

Disillusionment and Re-enchantment

Ethics, Criticism and Critical Literacy Teaching

after Post-structuralism

by

Allan Pride B.A. (Hons), Dip.Ed.

**Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

University of Tasmania / Dept of English and
European Languages &
Literature.

February 1997

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other higher degree or graduate diploma in any tertiary institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due acknowledgment is made in the text or in the footnotes.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'A. D. Side'.

This thesis may be made available for loan and limited copying in accordance with the Copyright Act 1968.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'A. D. Side'.

Abstract

Simplified forms of post-structuralism have recently been applied to the teaching of English in secondary schools in order to sanction multiple interpretations of a wider variety of texts, free students from slavishly adopting the evaluations of authorities, and encourage them to enjoy the interplay of contradictory and complementary readings. When linked to the purposes of political forms of criticism, this model of English is known as critical social literacy.

However, in my view difficulties in the epistemological and ethical underpinnings of this post-structuralist literacy are often overlooked, rendering its political agenda less effective. To the extent that post-structuralism questions the referentiality of language and the agency of discursively determined subjects, it undermines the construction of morally autonomous persons. Furthermore, the vulgar relativism entailed by a naive promotion of cultural pluralism hinders the resolution of destructive conflicts of interest. A deeper problem arises if post-structuralism is seen as a nihilistic philosophy, denying the possibility of moral principles and valorising only the will-to-power. When this notion is combined with the world-view of popular scientific materialism - that of a hostile universe formed by random processes - students may suffer a crisis of hope. In response to this I outline a pedagogy which supports an ethical approach to ethical and political education through reading and discussing literature.

Although post-structuralist ideas are vulnerable to particular criticisms, they offer insights into the limitations of discourse, textuality and agency which must be considered when devising an ethics to support the egalitarian aims of critical social literacy. However, more positive approaches to ethics, based on evolution, pragmatism and quantum mechanics, might also be incorporated in a new synthesis. Darwin's theory that organisms evolve through random variation and natural selection has been expanded and made more plausible by developments in mathematics and science, such as quantum mechanics, complexity theory, neuro-science and sociobiology. Popper's evolutionary epistemology supports the modest truth claims of the scientific method employed in these discourses, supplanting the more radical scepticism of post-structuralist epistemologies. Borrowing Zygmunt Bauman's terms, I call this synthesis 'the ethics of disillusionment and re-enchantment', since it combines procedural scepticism with renewed confidence in agency, referentiality and the flourishing of life. I explore how these ideas make sense of the world as it is modelled in three novels suitable for senior secondary study - Conrad's *Heart of*

Darkness, Chambers' *Breaktime*, and Byatt's 'Morpho Eugenia'. I do not claim to articulate fully a new theory - rather, in sketching its salient features, I offer tentative foundations for ethics as a viable concern in literary studies and critical literacy teaching.

Acknowledgments

I thank my supervisor, Dr Jennifer Livett, for her wise guidance and generous encouragement throughout the preparation of this thesis; the ex-Headmaster of The Hutchins School, Mr John Bednall, who understood what I saw as the educational significance of this project, granted me funding which made it possible for me to attend conferences throughout Australia and in New York, and seconded me to a position which allowed me more time to reflect on ethics, literary criticism and critical literacy teaching; and my wife, Maureen, who, together with our children, has patiently indulged my often exasperating obsession over the last five years.

Contents

Introduction 7

Part One: Theoria

Chapter 1

Problems: critical literacy / ethics / post-structuralism - an uneasy alliance

1. The ethics of post-structuralism versus the ethics of critical literacy? 22
2. The hegemony of morals and the necessity of ethics education 38
3. Post-structuralism versus metaphysics: play of opposites? 47
4. Post-structuralism and its critics 52
5. Ethical deconstruction: oxymoron or imperative? 64
6. A new theory of ethics? 66

Chapter 2

Possibilities: the attraction of evolutionary ethics

1. Evolutionary epistemology: foundation for a new synthesis 69
2. Evolutionary ethics: the limits of biology 78
3. Post-structuralist ethics: the limits of language 86
4. Pragmatist ethics: the limits of culture 91
5. Postmodern ethics: the limits of theory 94
6. Quantum ethics: the return of metaphysics 102
7. The ethics of 'disillusionment and re-enchantment': a modest synthesis 109

Part Two: Poiesia

Chapter 3

Literature and criticism as ethical reflection

1. Contemporary models of ethical criticism: introduction 113
2. *Heart of Darkness* and the ethics of lying: disillusionment 119
3. *Breaktime* and the ethics of fiction: re-enchantment 134
4. 'Morpho Eugenia' and the ethics of 'disillusionment and
re-enchantment' 154

Part Three: Praxis

Chapter 4

Critical literacy teaching as principled practice

1. Towards an ethical and political literacy 195
2. Teaching critical literacy ethically 204

***Bibliography* 218**

Introduction

It is unfortunate that Derrida's technique of deconstruction is much easier to reproduce than his capacities as a philosopher. In the hands of Derrida's followers, deconstruction has all too often become a means of warding off any real encounter with alternative perspectives. All possible non-Post-structuralist arguments are defeated before they even get started, defeated by an effortless out-conscious-ing. Thus does an apparently liberating height of awareness turn into a very great closer of minds. (Richard Harland 1993: 221)

Post-structuralist literary theories continue to have profound practical implications in university English departments and in my own profession as a teacher of English. It was with these implications in mind that I embarked upon this study, viewing both the theory and the practice from my dual perspective as a full-time teacher in charge of English from kindergarten to grade 12 in an independent school, and as a part-time postgraduate student in a university English department. The seeds of this study - if it is possible so to simplify its complex determinations - may be found in two events which occurred in 1991. The first was my attendance at the national conference of the Australian Association for the Teaching of English (AATE) in Brisbane, and the second was my appointment to a sub-committee charged with the task of developing a school-wide values education curriculum within the Hutchins School, Hobart.

The conference focused on the claim by keynote speakers that texts, the acts of reading and teaching, and other social practices are constructed by forces largely beyond individual control. It was also claimed that the insights and methods of recent literary theories - such as Marxist and feminist criticism, combined with a form of deconstruction - could nevertheless liberate individual teachers and students from prevailing prejudices and discriminatory practices concerning gender, class and race. As I read in preparation for the conference and then attended lectures and workshops, my initial reaction was that the ideas being presented in the name of post-structuralism seemed simplistic, incoherent and ultimately nihilistic. Yet they were being promoted as relevant to English teaching by well qualified people who patiently attempted to explain their theories to willing but perplexed listeners like me. Accordingly I was provoked to study post-structuralism in greater depth, especially as the subtleties of the issues were clearly going to be of increasing importance in my profession.

I was particularly concerned that teachers had too often been encouraged to adopt pedagogical practices based on principles which they had little time or inclination to study fully, and which the proponents - academics in teacher

training institutions, for whom such detailed study is their bread and butter - believed to be so important and urgent that they sometimes promoted them in simplified versions designed for immediate application in the classroom. Teachers had been invited to participate responsibly in such programs through 'action research', yet often, in my view, prematurely and with insufficient understanding of just how contentious the issues were in the academy. After more than twenty years of teaching, and with a conservatism bred of hindsight, I was embarrassed that I and my colleagues had adopted elements of a number of new approaches - such as the individualistic liberal humanism of the personal growth model, the neo-Marxist agenda of media studies, and the genre theory program for literacy teaching based on functional linguistics - without an adequate grasp of their philosophy and practice. Clearly we ought to be more cautious, more genuinely responsible, more informed, more patient - in short, more ethical - in our attempts to redefine educational ends and means, yet without abandoning the enthusiasm for necessary improvements which teachers, students and the wider society require in order to tackle the future confidently.

In this way teachers are confronted constantly with questions of value, both moral and otherwise. If 'How should we live?' is the fundamental question of ethics, then a subsequent question for educators is, 'What teaching methods will foster the kinds of life which we, the wider society and our children choose?' Ethical questions have always been inescapable in every area of life, but it is only in this post-structuralist phase of the twentieth century that ethical questions about the nature of texts and their inter-relationships with social and personal life have become urgent and divisive. The teaching methods which follow from these theories are an area of ideological practice which has been almost invisible in the current debate in university English departments: This idea was made more directly pertinent to my concerns about radical literary theory when it was drawn to my attention that an article had recently appeared in *Quadrant* in which David Parker (1990) raised serious questions about the implications of post-structuralism for ethical criticism, arguing for a return to ethics as a central concern of literary studies along lines proposed by the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum. (1989, 1990) Thus my desire to explore the relationship between ethics and theories of literary criticism took shape, driven by curiosity about these two philosophical topics and by concern for the ethics of my own professional conduct.

The second event, my appointment to a values education sub-committee, required close questioning of the aims and practices of a large Anglican school for boys - arguably an ideal subject for deconstruction of the discriminatory ideologies of gender, class, race and religion which might lie repressed beneath

its façade of moral rectitude. Thus it also reminded me, on the one hand, of the way in which ethical concerns interpenetrate all the educational decisions which are made more or less consciously about the curriculum and co-curriculum, and wholly unconsciously about the 'hidden curriculum'; and, on the other hand, of the difficulty of finding a purely rational (as opposed to a broadly religious) foundation for the moral values which the school publicly espoused in its statement of aims and objectives. In this last matter the study of ethics in the Western philosophical tradition was taken as our guide, though of course the question of a rational foundation for morality remains vexed.

A further problem occupied much of our preliminary work on the sub-committee: that of indoctrination. A school which promotes a particular set of religious and moral values must surely be alert to the accusation of indoctrinating its students. Indeed, this is an accusation to which all schools, both state and independent, are vulnerable, although at least ours could claim that its values were clearly and publicly stated and that parents had a choice about whether or not their sons should be exposed to them. To further obviate the charge of indoctrination the sub-committee recommended that, whenever appropriate and possible, teachers should declare to students the school's position (if it had one) on the value in question, their own positions, and the fact that other views exist, in order to emphasise to the students their right and responsibility to make up their own minds. Nevertheless, while the school encourages its students to question all its religious and moral values, and can tolerate a variety of values expressed in the students' conduct, it has to acknowledge limits to its tolerance, for it simply cannot function if it allows its fundamental values to be consistently flouted. The conflict between the value of tolerance and that of maintaining a coherent and stable society for the well-being of its inhabitants is a perennial problem for liberal, democratic, pluralist societies, yet it is merely typical of the moral dilemmas which ethics describes and seeks to clarify. Clearly the particular dilemma which I have just raised is one of many which frequently perplex the teacher of literature: are there limits to our tolerance of the expression of differing moral values by individuals through the texts which are created in, or selected for, the classroom? Should we, for example, remove from the library shelves picture books which contain stereotyped gender roles?

Wrestling with such questions as they apply to the whole school curriculum, and especially to my own concerns as a student and teacher of literature, I became acutely aware of the need for an understanding of the nature of ethics itself, and of its intimate relationship to language, literature, criticism, creative writing and education - an understanding which will guide teachers and

students in making the moral judgements demanded by English studies in schools and universities. Inevitably, teaching - like the texts on which it selectively focuses - reflects the implicit moral values of each educational institution and its individual teachers. It is important, as I have indicated, to make those values explicit, and so open them up to the informed processes of public criticism by which a liberal democracy seeks to reform itself in the light of changing circumstances. I began to hope that, while pursuing a study of some aspects of ethics and criticism in the wake of post-structuralism, and reflecting on its implications for teaching, there might be opportunities to offer my insights and concerns on a larger stage. Then my professional colleagues, and perhaps members of the wider community which educational institutions serve, might participate in the important decisions which continually have to be made about the ends and means of education. Such decisions, especially those concerning ends, should not be left to academics and teachers alone.

In the years that followed, from 1992 to 1995, I set myself the task of presenting papers at each of the AATE National Conferences and finally at the IFTE/NCTE conference in New York, exploring some of the ethical implications of post-structuralist literary theories for the teaching of literature and critical literacy, and advocating the re-instatement of ethics education as a central concern of English studies. The mood at some of these events was such that anyone adopting a cautious view of post-structuralism, no matter how carefully argued their case might be, found themselves marginalised by the exponents of a theory which purported to be the champion of the marginalised. Thus it became clear that post-structuralist literary theories were gaining the status of a new orthodoxy among English educationists, as well as in university English departments, and that anyone who had misgivings about aspects of this movement would need to adopt an open-minded and balanced approach, attempting to uncover the attractions and strengths of its ideas as well as their weaknesses. Indeed, this seemed to me not just politic, but also the only ethical way to proceed.

There is no doubt that post-structuralist theories have indeed changed the face of English studies in university departments around the world, and have become increasingly influential in schools, whatever the status of these ideas in other disciplines. (For example they generally do not seem to be held in such high regard in Australian philosophy departments.) In this milieu teachers and critics are more concerned about the politics of literacy, and the role of language and literature in the oppression and liberation of disempowered groups through the interplay of multiple interpretations and modes of being, than they are about the ethical underpinnings of such political interests. Hence the time is indeed

overdue for English teachers to reconsider the possibilities for ethics today, including the role of ethics in literary education and of literature in ethics education. Of course literary studies have always been regarded as having something to contribute to the teaching of morality, from Plato, (Lee, Ed., 1967) who in *The Republic* allowed only a heavily censored role for literature, to some recent moral philosophers, such as Martha Nussbaum (1990) and Richard Rorty, (1991) who find in literature a unique form of moral discourse. It is only in the last three decades that this view has fallen from favour amongst some literary theorists. Nevertheless, the popularity of post-structuralism and political criticism does pose very real challenges to a rethinking of the ethics of writing, reading and discussing literature in our times, and it is with these challenges that my study begins. However, lest I be seen as dourly reductive in my use of literature, I hasten to add that of course literature's function is not solely moral: the good life holds pleasures beyond any smug assurance that we are trying to do the right thing, whatever that may be.

Because ethics and literary theory are abstract topics which have practical, if problematic, implications in personal and public spheres, particularly in literary criticism and pedagogy, I have organised this discussion under headings provided by Aristotle's three categories of knowledge: *Theoria*, *Poiesia* and *Praxis*.¹ These may be roughly translated as: (1) Theory - in particular disciplines such as literary theory, ethics, epistemology and evolutionary theory; (2) Craft - the doing, which is at once a way of knowing, developed and expressed in such ongoing acts as criticism, creative writing, making moral decisions and teaching; and (3) Political Practice - especially the politics of literary criticism and literacy teaching, in which politics is conceived of as a mode of deliberate or theorised action aimed at improving some aspect of life. While Aristotle saw the life of the theoretician, or philosopher, as the highest calling, he recognised that his knowledge could not be complete, partly because he could never fashion a theory of everything (though he certainly tried) and partly because the knowledge of the politician and the craftsman were of a different order, thereby supplying an indispensable complement to the more abstract knowledge of the philosopher. In our more egalitarian society we might wish to revise these sentiments by asserting that none of the above ways of living and knowing should be privileged over the others. Indeed, our ideal of a universal and comprehensive education aims to create a society in which every adult is a thinker, worker and political activist. Yet, in the interest shown by

¹ I am indebted to Thomas H. Groome's (1980) *Christian Religious Education: Sharing our Story and Vision* for the conception of Aristotle's three ways of knowing which I am using here.

academics and teachers in recent literary theory, there has been a distinct tendency to privilege theory over practice, the philosopher over the critic, the reader over the writer, the academic over the classroom teacher. At the same time, as a result of the Marxist base of most post-structuralist theories, there has been a desire to see the implications of both theory and practice as simply political rather than ethical, as if ethics and politics could be ultimately separated. It seems, however, that there are those (e.g. Fredric Jameson, 1991) who think a radical separation is possible, not because they seriously wish to conduct their politics in an immoral way, but because, on the contrary, having conceived of ethics as a discourse of the ruling class concerned to bolster up its position of dominance by inculcating a narrow middle-class morality, such reformers consider ethics irrelevant or distinctly harmful to their commitment to create a more just, free and equal society. However, marginalising ethics in favour of politics is simply to make a clumsy distinction which, as David Parker (1993a) points out, does not remove the ethical from politics at all.

In commencing this project I must draw attention to an apparently more serious threat to the possibility of defining an ethics of literary theory, literary criticism and critical literacy teaching - one which will be a major theme of this study. There is an element in post-structuralist theories which undermines the very possibility of ethics existing at all, by denying the referentiality of texts - the ability of texts to refer to the 'real' world beyond themselves - and the agency of the subject - the ability of humans to exercise free will. At least this trend would be more disturbing if it were not for the fact that the theory is continually contradicted by the practice of its exponents. What we have seen in this recent philosophical movement is, among other things, yet another turn in the old debate between free will and determinism, as will become clear as this study progresses. Yet whatever may emerge concerning the existence of human freedom - and I predict that the convergence of quantum mechanics, cybernetics, neuro-science and cognitive psychology will throw new light on this subject - critics and teachers constantly assume the 'commonsense' view that we can exercise some degree of agency. In this study I refer to some recent arguments which lend support to the idea that common sense has some validity, contradicting some of the more radically sceptical claims of constructivists.

My broad aims in restoring a more balanced view of the relationship between ethics, literary studies and critical literacy are to propose, through a necessarily limited marshalling of theory and example, that teachers and critics should seek a clearer understanding of the nature of ethics itself; to demonstrate that ethics is indissolubly linked to all three realms of knowing and doing - *theoria*, *poiesia* and *praxis* - as they apply to literary criticism and teaching; to

show that the skill of making sound ethical as well as political judgements must be learned and taught through both philosophical analysis and the practice of making the ethical and political decisions inherent in all acts, including the acts of creating, criticising and theorising about literary and other texts; and to re-affirm the role of literary studies in developing ethical and political awareness. In what follows I attempt to give equal weight to each of these aims, but if it seems that I have privileged theory by considering it first (which of course does not prohibit the reader from considering it last) and at greater length, it is because I believe that at the moment the championing of post-structuralism by some educators and critics as the new theory of literary studies is generating problems of practice which in general have not been sufficiently identified and examined. Indeed, I contend that we have not seen in post-structuralism's influence on literary studies a Copernican revolution, but rather a complication and exaggeration of ideas which have long been recognised in various ways and to various degrees in the Western tradition.

Whilst for some of my readers post-structuralist theories might remain the new orthodoxy, others might object that these ideas, having already been the subject of extensive criticism from 1990 to 1995 (far more extensive than I have been able to indicate in this study), are already passé, and that therefore my project is now irrelevant. That would be premature, especially as the ideas which have been gathered under this title are now recognised in academic circles (if not yet in schools) as many and varied, and while some may ultimately languish in obscurity as discredited curiosities, others will no doubt survive the test of time. Literary studies never really leave behind the influence of critical movements; their insights are added to the useful baggage critics and teachers carry with them for the rest of the journey. Nevertheless, post-structuralism has been unfolding for over three decades now, long enough for academics of all persuasions to be gaining some perspective on it and to have marshalled critiques which are carefully reasoned rather than just reactionary - though, I hasten to add, it has been little more than a decade since post-structuralism began to filter through to English teachers in Australia. While there are signs of a cooler, more wide-ranging, less partisan discussion of the nature of post-structuralist theories and their place in literary and cultural studies - in short, of the advent of a *post*-post-structuralist period - it is evident that post-structuralism is still the reigning paradigm in most university English and Cultural Studies departments and among English educationists. My particular concern is with the versions of post-structuralism, which some of the latter are still promoting as a foundation for teaching critical literacy through literary and

other texts. Many reasons have been suggested for the attraction which post-structuralism holds in these circles and I touch upon some of these in the course of this study.

A further possible objection to my project must also be answered at this point. Surely it is too ambitious an enterprise to identify all of the ethical implications of post-structuralism for literary criticism and teaching; to review the very many criticisms and defences of post-structuralist theories in order to decide what aspects can justifiably be rejected and what retained; to examine the varied ethical theories which moral philosophers have been proposing and evaluate their usefulness to critics and teachers; and to discuss and illustrate the possibilities for the craft of ethical criticism and for the ethics of English teaching? Of course I cannot hope to do all of that, let alone to offer anything really new in every one of these areas. What I have tried to do, and what I think will be innovative in the context of secondary school and university English teaching, is, first, to alert my colleagues, who have not been kept well enough informed by enthusiastic promoters of post-structuralism and critical literacy, of some of the problems and possibilities for ethics, ethical criticism and an ethical critical literacy in the wake of post-structuralism; and, second, to introduce and illustrate what I consider to be a more fruitful contribution to epistemology, ethics and literary studies: that of the latest evolutionary theories. Thus I attempt to map some previously unfamiliar terrain which will be very relevant to English teachers today, and so point out new directions for study. Having laid these foundations, I can then offer by way of example one new approach to the ethical criticism of some literary texts which could be taught to senior secondary students, and some ideas for the re-establishment of an ethical literary criticism and critical literacy teaching.

Throughout this work, unless otherwise specified, I make the following distinction between ethics and morality: ethics refers very broadly to the practice of reasoning together about the question, 'How should we live?' while morality refers to the particular codes of conduct which an individual or community adopts, overtly and tacitly, in answer to this question.² This seems to be a helpful conception. It can certainly encompass the following questions which are particularly relevant to my project, although I do not pretend to have answered them all: 'How should we conduct literary studies in the light of post-structuralism?' and, 'Is it possible to determine some rules to guide our efforts in this area?' Further questions follow: are there some kinds of texts which are

² See Louis Pojman (1995: 1-17) for a more detailed discussion of the relationship between the concepts of morality and ethics.

more open to deconstruction than others; is it possible to say anything useful about an author's intentions; are there any limits to the multiplication of different readings of a text; can we afford simply to enjoy the free play of indeterminate meanings or must we finally choose between them for ethical and political reasons; on what grounds can we make such choices; are we indeed free to make any choices at all or are we totally determined by the discourses which intersect in our lives?

The simplified version of post-structuralism which is being promoted for consumption by teachers and their students, and which is the particular focus of my study, has been usefully summarised by Wendy Morgan: (1992)

- 1) Texts are produced within the historical and cultural contexts which shape them; the discourses available at the time of writing govern what can be said and how it can be said.
- 2) No text is a unity, complete and consistent; it must encompass silences, incoherencies, contradictions.
- 3) Readings produce meanings. There is no single, pre-existent, 'authorised' meaning of a text, which determines how it is to be read; instead, different, often contradictory meanings will be available in specific historical, cultural and textual contexts.
- 4) Any text constructs a version of reality; that version convinces those readers who find it reflects 'the way things are', 'what goes without saying', 'the truth of the matter'. (76-81)

Critical literacy has been conveniently described by Colin Lankshear (1994), building particularly on the work of Paulo Freire (1972), Gunther Kress (1985), James Gee (1990), Catherine Wallace (1992) and Pam Gilbert (1993). Broadly speaking it is a set of pedagogical practices designed to expose the ways in which texts have been constructed to serve the interests of dominant power groups in society through covertly or, at least, implicitly positioning readers to accept the *status quo* as natural. Students are taught to expose the gaps, contradictions and silences in texts, both canonical and popular, by which the interests of oppressed groups have been marginalised, and to engage in the struggle to empower these groups by rereading existing texts and constructing new and differently interested ones. Fundamentally critical literacy is a Marxist pedagogy and, like all Marxist theories, it tends to imply a certain morality: for example all classes should have equal access to social 'goods'. This morality usually remains an unexamined assumption among literacy theorists even though, as Slack and Whitt (1992: 571) point out, cultural theorists have begun to recognise that ethical issues raised by their research deserve critical attention.

The concepts of modernity and postmodernity are more difficult to pin down, partly because so much has been written about them from so many

different perspectives,³ and partly because they refer to aspects of cultural history through which we are still living. Thus they are too complex and too immediate to be entirely clear, and in any case they will probably always remain somewhat contentious, just as the idea of Romanticism has. However, I am using these terms as follows.

Modernity, it is generally accepted, germinated in the Renaissance, flowered in the Enlightenment, and came to fruition in the Industrial Revolution which stretches from the end of the eighteenth century into (at least) the middle of our own. The great project of modernity has been to achieve a systematic understanding of the whole of existence and to bring everything under human control. Hence modernity is associated with the growth of science, which accompanied the development of rationalism and empiricism, and the decay of Christianity, which was seen by many thinkers to rely ultimately on superstition and emotion. Yet modernity has not enjoyed a steadily increasing domination; rather it has been beset by a series of fluctuating counter-movements, including Romanticism, symbolism, spiritualism, hippiedom and New Age beliefs. Finally, some would say, with the failure of a common belief in an essential, God-created human self or spirit, modernity's project to unravel the mysteries of the universe, to liberate us from the fear of the gods and to create a technological utopia has declined beyond resuscitation in the global wars and environmental disasters of the twentieth century. The Romantics, it seems, may have been right all along: modernity is akin to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, who represents a self-centred, egotistical rationality that investigates, creates but refuses to nurture. By the overweening invention of scientific ambition, modernity is reducing the world to a wasteland. Yet late traces of modernity's dream live on in the minds of many contemporary optimists - including scientists such as Paul Davies (1992) and Steven Weinberg (1992) who still speak of the possibility of developing a totally unified theory in particle physics and cosmology - in spite of widespread postmodern scepticism about the very possibility of a totalising system of thought and of the utopia it might empower mankind to create.

Postmodernity, which might be described as the new Romanticism, could be seen to have its beginnings in thinkers like William Blake, and later to be revealed in those apparently contradictory impulses of the Victorians towards, on the one hand, scientific materialism and, on the other, the search for evidence of life after death in spiritualism, which A.S. Byatt (1992) portrays so compellingly in *Angels and Insects*, a novella which I examine in detail in

³ See for example Lyotard (1984), Vattimo (1988), Hutcheon (1989), Ross (1989), Jameson (1991), McGowan (1991), Bauman (1992), Docherty (1993).

Chapter 3. Today, with the information revolution fully upon us, we are overwhelmed by the contradictions and discontinuities of the myriad competing claims about the nature of human existence criss-crossing in the webs of cyberspace and slugging it out at the political negotiating tables and on the battlefields of the world. Thus rigorously open-minded people frequently find themselves constrained by an agnostic eclecticism, unable to commit themselves totally to any creed, whether it be scientism, one of the ancient world religions, some new age patchwork of neo-paganism and Eastern religion, the philosophy of post-structuralism, or the search for ecstasy and self-knowledge through a deliberate transgression of social boundaries such as James Miller (1994) presents Michel Foucault as pursuing. Yet, in spite of this decentring impetus, perhaps the late nineteenth century conflict between the material and the spiritual can still be seen as one of the central dilemmas of our age, and indeed of the whole Western tradition which seems to be reaching a crisis point today. Indeed, a renewed concern with what would traditionally have been regarded as spiritual matters can be seen in Derrida's recent book (1995), *The Gift of Death*, and in Foucault's (1984) turning to Greek ethics in his last, uncompleted work.

The binary opposition of matter and spirit goes all the way back to the beginnings of Western culture, where it can be seen most starkly in the conflict between the sophists and Platonists of ancient Greece. Derrida's (1976) deconstruction of such dualities is an attempt to collapse the founding categories of our thought and to point to some other, as yet only dimly perceived, mode of structuring our vision of the world, one which would be more egalitarian since it would be free from the oppression caused by privileging one of the binary terms over the other, as 'spirit' has traditionally been privileged over 'matter' in academic circles.⁴ Yet, ironically, even this project seems to participate in its own way in the hubristic, totalising ambitions of modernity, such that post-structuralism can be seen as the currently dominant term in a binary opposition with essentialism. The great moral lesson of postmodernism may well be, as Zygmunt Baumann (1993: 31-36) maintains, that our actions should be conditioned more by our knowledge of the great deal that we do not know than by the very little that we do. However, as I hope to show, this does not mean that we should abandon the search for truth, but we may need to be more modest about how successful we can expect to be.

⁴ Yet it is a curious paradox that 'matter', the body, property, and chemical and organic structures of all kinds have at the same time and increasingly been the actual concern of academics, as opposed to the ostensible superiority of spirit in their work.

In Part One of this study, *Theoria*, I examine some of the problems and possibilities for ethics which arise in critical literacy education and literary criticism in the wake of post-structuralism.

In Chapter 1 I introduce a number of texts aimed at English teachers and/or students in order to show how simplified are the post-structuralist critical theories which have recently been adopted by language and literacy educationists and applied to the inescapably ethical practices of the teaching of English with at least two aims in mind. The first aim has been to sanction a plurality of readings of any text, thereby freeing students from slavishly adopting the interpretations and evaluations of authorities, whilst encouraging them to engage with a wider variety of texts and find pleasure in the interplay of multiple contradictory and complementary readings. The second aim has given a political edge to this agenda by linking a debased form of Derrida's deconstructive methods to the purposes of political criticism, especially neo-Marxist, feminist and post-colonial criticism.

This approach, a diluted version of the new 'cultural studies' in universities and known as 'critical social literacy' in schools, pursues pluralist and egalitarian goals which appear to be thoroughly laudable. However, even though the problems which extreme forms of post-structuralism raise for ethical discourse should by now be well known, several difficulties in the ethical underpinnings of this post-structuralist literacy education have been overlooked, rendering it less effective in promoting its political agenda. First, to the extent that post-structuralism calls into question the referentiality of language and the agency of the discursively determined subject, it renders the project of ethics in developing morally autonomous persons more dubious. Nevertheless, while a number of feminists have urgently discussed the contradictions for women in this tension between theory and practice, many post-structuralist educators seem oblivious. They assume that language refers at least to certain social realities, and that students can be taught to exercise at least sufficient agency to choose between more, or less, empowering readings of texts. Second, a more crippling ethical problem arises in the vulgar relativism entailed by a naive promotion of cultural pluralism. In a pluralist, liberal democracy, which rightly or wrongly promotes the pursuit of the maximum multiplicity of interests, there will inevitably arise conflicts of interest calling for the application of more fundamental principles by which those conflicts may be resolved. While academics have wrestled with the problem of whether, in fact, post-structuralist philosophies are able to offer such ethical principles, few educationists have troubled to inquire into this issue. Those who have, with unrecognised irony, tend to look for their ethical theory to other philosophical traditions which post-

structuralists have commonly sought to problematise. Third, an even deeper problem arises if post-structuralism is seen as a nihilistic philosophy which denies the possibility of all moral principles and valorises the exercising by individuals and interest groups of the will-to-power. When this view is combined with the picture of the world offered by popular versions of scientific materialism - that of a hostile universe formed by completely random processes - it may become more difficult to inspire students to persevere in making the world a better place for present and future generations. Hence I introduce several critiques of post-structuralism in order to demonstrate that it has proved vulnerable to criticism from a variety of perspectives. However, what remains after these attacks offers useful insights into the limitations of discourse, textuality and agency which must be taken into account in devising a plausible ethical theory.

In Chapter 2 I illustrate some recent approaches to ethics and ethical criticism from evolutionary, post-structuralist, pragmatist, postmodern, and quantum mechanics perspectives, and I suggest a synthesis of various elements from among these approaches which a new theory of ethics for our times would need to incorporate. I argue that this new approach should be centred on Darwin's (1859) theory that organisms evolve by means of random variation and natural selection, a theory which has been expanded and made more plausible by developments in mathematics and science, such as quantum mechanics, complexity theory, neuro-science and sociobiology. I maintain that Popper's (1979) evolutionary epistemology supports the modest truth claims of the scientific method employed in these fields of inquiry, thus supplanting the more radical scepticism of post-structuralist epistemologies. I call the proposed synthesis of the ethical theories listed above 'the ethics of disillusionment and re-enchantment' (to borrow Bauman's, 1993, terms), since it combines methodological scepticism with a renewed confidence in the possibilities of the agency of human beings and the referentiality (i.e. the truth claims) of the arts and sciences, and in the flourishing of life on earth. I do not claim to have fully articulated a new theory; rather in sketching some of its salient features I hope to offer a *possible* foundation for reinstating ethics as a central concern in literary criticism and critical literacy teaching, demonstrating that critics and teachers should look beyond the negative, anti-rationalist metaphysics of post-structuralism for the construction of more valid and productive approaches to ethical issues.

In Part Two, '*Poiesia*' (Chapter 3), I put this sketch for a better theory of ethics to the test in the first of my two areas of practical concern - the craft of literary criticism - by offering readings of three literary texts - Joseph Conrad's

Heart of Darkness, Aidan Chambers' *Breaktime* and A.S. Byatt's 'Morpho Eugenia' - which are suitable for study at senior secondary school level, and which demonstrate how an ethics of disillusionment and re-enchantment makes sense of the world as modelled in these fictions. In doing this I also consider some of the implications for teaching these texts to senior students.

In Part Three, '*Praxis*' (Chapter 4), I draw some conclusions from all of the foregoing discussion for my second and wider area of practical concern: the ethics and politics of critical literacy teaching in the education of teenagers and young adults. Finally I outline a pedagogy which supports an ethical approach to moral, ethical and political education through reading and discussing literature.

Part One: Theoria

Chapter 1

Problems: critical literacy / ethics / post-structuralism - an uneasy alliance

1. The ethics of post-structuralism versus the ethics of critical literacy?

Brian Moon, in a 1990 essay, recognises the importance of the ethical implications of post-structuralism for English teaching when he writes about Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*, a very personal reflection on the nature of photography and a study of the place of death in Western thinking:

Such new directions in writing raise questions. How should teachers of 'Literature' respond? How will they position this text? Should they accommodate the new critical approaches? Should they stop teaching high school students the conventional notion of genres? Should they (if they are still doing it!) stop teaching students to look for 'what the author meant'? These are not idle questions. How we answer them will have real, direct consequences in our society, and in this sense it can be argued that post-structuralism has succeeded in restoring social consciousness to textual theory. Nor will changes be restricted to the English departments of schools, colleges and universities, for there is no better subject for deconstruction than the structure of traditional Western culture itself. (19)

Moon then illustrates his point by discussing the application of a form of deconstruction in feminist criticism to expose the pervasive patriarchalism of our culture. Post-structuralism, as Moon presents it, can be an instrument of liberation: by deconstructing the structures of society both men and women can be alerted to the inherited patterns of thought which have constructed the prison of a gendered identity and which limit the play of new and multiple identities. Thus a feminist appropriation of deconstruction opens the way for a deliberate reconstruction of a more just and equal society. In a similar manner, Moon might also have argued, a post-colonial application of deconstruction to notions of race in the Western imperialist tradition can help to construct a more tolerant multicultural society. However, Moon is using the term 'deconstruction' in a very debased sense, which amounts to little more than a particular form of Marxist-motivated textual analysis, a mere pointing at questionable ideological assumptions and at various other possible interpretations. Derrida's deconstruction is a process of sophisticated critical enquiry from which emerges the 'aporia' in a particular text, the particular passages and moments when they reveal the philosophical emptiness of the whole enterprise of 'realist' referentiality in literature.

But, if Moon's deconstruction, however well or poorly done, does expose the multitude of meanings possible in a text, it also raises some obvious problems. First, are there any limits to the number of readings - some of which may be contradictory - a text can be justifiably held to sustain? And, if there are, how are these limits to be defined? Second, and more important from the point of view of this study, the use of deconstruction to expose a variety of interpretations still leaves the reader with the responsibility of assigning relative values to these readings. It is all very well to talk of enjoying the play of possible meanings, but in the end most teachers will be obliged to make decisions which reveal their preferences. In a book entitled *Reading Hamlet*, which examines different ways of reading Gertrude and Ophelia, Bronwyn Mellor (1989) writes:

So are we simply left with a number of readings from which to choose? In a sense, yes. But this is not saying that any reading will do and that it just 'depends on your opinion'.

Readings assign particular meanings and affirm certain values. This is another way of saying that readings are constructed to support particular views of the world and how it should be. A.C. Bradley's reading of Gertrude (47-8), for example, supports particular views of how women should behave. Choosing between readings involves debating meanings and questioning values. (77)

Having conceded this vital point, Mellor gives no guidance as to how questions of competing values should be resolved.

The problem appears even more strikingly in an article, or series of confessions, by Vivienne Muller. (1990) Claiming to be parodying a script for *Days of Our Lives*, she presents us with this scene, which takes place between a student and herself:

Boy (querulous): Did you really mean what you said in the lecture yesterday? Do you *really* believe in feminism?

Me (adamant): Well, yes. I don't agree with Ruthven, that a feminist approach is 'just another way of looking at text.' I think some commitment is necessary - particularly with ideological-based criticism. Otherwise how could such a subversive and potentially transformative discourse be effective and avoid becoming mainstream, monolithic, logocentric?

Boy (triumphantly): Ah... you're ugly anyway!... (34)

So, 'some commitment is necessary'! Indeed, but the boy has already made his commitment and how is he to be convinced that he should re-examine and change it? Furthermore, how can English teachers justify such 'social engineering' and what pedagogical praxis can they draw on for the re-education of values? In the era of the so-called 'backlash against feminism', for example, we cannot rely on education against gender discrimination retaining the priority which it has been accorded in schools of education and government

departments. Muller, in the title of her article, 'Private Discourses from the Pedagogic Trenches', reveals that she feels beleaguered. Later (Chapter 1.2) I will suggest that re-inforcements at least, if not a whole new strategy, are available in the literature on values education.

To return to the essay by Moon referred to above, another ethical dimension of his representation of deconstruction becomes apparent:

I began with the observation that post-structuralism is not monolithic, and this point must be re-affirmed. Within post-structuralism there are many potential directions. One can pursue an anarchic line, demonstrating over and over the impossibility of truth, the relativity of all things. Or one can turn the project to practical ends, as the feminist movement has done. (Moon, 1990: 20)

I have already pointed out some of the ethical dilemmas opened up by Moon's second potential direction of post-structuralism. I do not suppose that many teachers would want to opt for the first of these directions: to dismantle their students' faith in the possibility of making meaning at all and to encourage a form of nihilism. Such pessimism might find all too ready acceptance in the minds of a generation of students who are discovering, for example, that their society denies so many of them a place in the workforce. Yet the possibility of inadvertently promoting nihilism remains, and that is one reason why I am questioning the implications for teaching of post-structuralist positions and critical practices.

In the first essay of his collection, *Reconstructing Literature Teaching: New Essays on the Teaching of Literature*, Jack Thomson (1992) makes some very telling points:

If the logic of post-structuralism implies the end of notions of philosophical truth, interpretation, meaning, reference, narrative, history and value, we have to recognise the need for an ethical stance constructed from the work of the deconstructive philosophers Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Roland Barthes. Theirs is not a vision of apocalyptic emptiness but a clear-sighted honesty about facing, demystifying and deconstructing the myths and illusions of our culture, and of its signifying practices which have created the myths and illusions, all of which we have come to see as natural rather than as artificial and constructed. We cannot subscribe to nihilism because we have responsibilities to other human beings, and especially in our case, to our students. By all means let us be sceptical and knowledgeable about the referential and communicative limitations of language and texts, about the difficulties of establishing a representational relationship between words and things, but as English teachers we also have sufficient ethical understanding to see the real difference between the image of an expensively clothed and half naked model in *Vogue* magazine and the image of an emaciated and half naked Ethiopian woman trying to feed her starving baby on A.B.C. News... There is some reference in texts and *some* freedom in interpreters. (19, 20)

In making such a bald assertion in his last sentence Thomson is nevertheless in good company. As I will show, (Chapter 1.5) he is quite justified in believing that the reflexivity and linguistic determinism of some post-structuralist thought is overstated. However, I am also interested in his plea for an ethical program in teaching deconstruction. Thomson has clear ideas about how students can be taught to read in such a way that alternative values are brought to light, but he does not suggest how students can develop the ability to make sound moral judgements between competing values. He simply assumes that teachers, and hence students, already know which of the alternatives they should choose. Indeed post-structuralist literary criticism and pedagogy typically make such assumptions, thereby concealing their ethical foundations just as much as more traditional approaches have done. Unfortunately moral judgements are not as clear cut as Thomson would have us believe in his example of the *Vogue* model versus the Ethiopian woman. Therefore, even after sorting out the confusions caused by the comparison of two visual symbols from the different discourses of news reporting and fashion advertising, students and teachers will still need the help of the organising concepts and rational methods of ethics - hence my attempt to revive and re-fashion the traditionally close association between literary criticism, ethics and education.

In a later essay in the same volume, 'Imagining Realities: Values and literature,' Robert McGregor directly addresses the issue of how texts can be used to shape the values of students. McGregor's approach takes no account of post-structuralist ideas of narrative and character and therefore seems out of place in Thomson's book. Indeed, the fact that Thomson was unable to include a more up-to-date discussion of the topic is indicative of the failure of English teachers to pay adequate attention to the ethics of their enterprise. However, McGregor does introduce some useful techniques for helping literature students to clarify their own values and the values seemingly presented in the text. He focuses particularly on the use of imagination in order to empathise with the situation of characters and to explore other possible courses of action, before attempting to make ethical judgements. This goes some way towards establishing a program of ethics education, for the imagination is indeed fundamental to ethical judgement. But McGregor's approach is severely limited in that it does not provide students with an understanding of other possible grounds for making sound ethical judgements, or with the necessary reasoning skills. Values clarification, while once the fashion in ethics education, is now seen as an inadequate model, since it does not provide for the development of such judgement and of what might be regarded as the humane virtues which are necessary in creating an adequate degree of social harmony. Hence McGregor's

essay, which is an account of things that happened in his Year 10 class in 1986, seems even more out of place in a book entitled *Reconstructing Literature Teaching*. As I pointed out above, few teachers, even in a commendable spirit of non-judgmentalism, or conscious of the dangers of a blind allegiance to political correctness, will be satisfied with the student who at the end of a values clarification lesson acknowledges his sexism and reaffirms his commitment to it.

In concluding his essay McGregor makes an observation which opens up fruitful ways of pursuing his thesis towards a more satisfactory program of ethics education:

The development of personal values - and the sense that one possesses personal choices for action - relies upon experience of interaction with other people where such choices are laid bare and examined. English classrooms and texts provide an appropriate venue for such experience. (Thomson, 1992: 147)

Two points can be made here: first, the notion that 'one possesses personal choices for action' has been seriously challenged by post-structuralism. However, Thomson in his comments quoted above rejects the post-structuralists' neo-deterministic view of the wholly linguistic construction of the self and asserts the existence of free will, a power which is of course fundamental to any discussion of the relevance of ethics. It is intriguing to note the persistence of this idea of the freedom of the subject in texts aiming to introduce post-structuralism to teachers and students (I will illustrate this point in a moment). Second, McGregor recognises the importance in the development of personal values of 'the experience of interaction with other people where...choices are laid bare and examined.' This idea of interaction is at the heart of the 'community of inquiry' approach to values education which I describe in Chapter 4, and it is also fundamental to notions of the construction of the self espoused by the moral philosopher, Charles Taylor. (1989)

Making Meanings (Forrestal, 1992) is a course-book designed for junior secondary classes. Among other things, it introduces, through a series of rigidly guided activities, post-structuralist concepts such as how multiple readings are possible, how beliefs influence readings, how readings are constructed (including dominant and resistant readings) and how readers use other stories they have read to read new stories. The implicit aim of these activities seems to be ethical, that is to construct student readers who are aware of the way in which they are being constructed by other texts, and so to liberate them to make their own choices. Students are encouraged to reflect on their own beliefs by an author (or authority) who addresses them as reasonable and relatively free

subjects - though, ironically, at no stage are they invited to act as resistant readers of Forrestal's text, an invitation which Thomson (1992) is careful to offer the adult readers in the introduction to his book.

In *Making Meanings* several ethical issues are raised through engagement with a variety of texts. Among them are: indifference to the suffering of others contrasted with terrorism as a political act - depicted in a pop song and a poem; smoking - as portrayed in advertising; and attitudes to gender - revealed in dominant versus resistant readings and retellings of traditional tales. Not only are students asked to identify the varying attitudes of others and to clarify their own, but they are also introduced to some of the ways in which aspects of their culture have influenced their beliefs, thus laying the foundation for an excellent values education program. Indeed the book goes a step further in Chapter 11 where students are asked to form an opinion on the issues of duck shooting and eating meat, after sample arguments have been presented for and against. The students then explore what is involved in presenting their views through the mass media. Here they are moving from ethics into the related area of political action, but before they get to this stage they are challenged to give reasons and examples which would support their opinions, and to test their arguments in class debates. Unhappily, from the point of view of a thorough ethics education, there is no help given at this point concerning the difficulties of establishing sound reasoning skills and of bringing them to bear on the rhetoric which commonly operates in both the mass media and school debating. Yet the need for such assistance would quickly become apparent in the course of spirited discussion. It is just here that the philosophical discipline of ethical inquiry can make an important contribution.

Wendy Morgan's book, *A Post-Structuralist English Classroom: The Example of Ned Kelly*, was also first published in 1992. In it she gives, for the benefit of teachers, a very detailed account of a unit of work designed to introduce her Grade 10 class to a range of post-structuralist ideas about textuality, and especially about the conflicting ways in which historical figures are constructed and reconstructed in a wide variety of literary and other texts. This is a fascinating book and an excellent example of how students can be led, for the most part in an ethically defensible way, to a post-structuralist understanding of texts, without burdening them with theoretical terms. Indeed, the particular understanding of theory which directed Morgan's experiment is not fully explained until the last section of the book. I have quoted her list, minus the commentary, in my introduction. (p. 14) Her fourth point - that 'any text constructs a version of reality [which] convinces those readers who find it

reflects "the way things are", "what goes without saying", "the truth of the matter" (76-81) - indicates clearly that Morgan is aware of the political, and hence ethical, dimension of her project: that is to liberate her students from unconscious ideological construction in the same way that Forrestal and Thomson seek to do. She is even uncomfortably aware of the need to liberate her students from her own authoritative intervention in their lives:

It's obvious that I am an interventionist teacher, and my students tend to bestow on me the role of expert authority. So even when I'm explicit about where I'm coming from in my readings (as I am about my feminism), and where other readings are coming from, and even when I try to show how texts speak differently and partially, and deliberately instruct my students not to believe my version - even then I think my students will look to me for the meaning I derive from any text. They may even believe that I'll find their readings more acceptable in so far as they conform to my views and learn to use my terms. And to be honest, it's hard for me, as it is for any teacher, to avoid nudging my students to take up my preferred reading position. I may not be aware that I'm doing it even as I pay lip service to the relativity of all readings. How much plurality of meaning can be accommodated in my classroom when I'm in control of the teaching? How far will I permit resistant readings of my texts and my readings? (84, 85)

This passage illustrates clearly the strength in that fundamental paradox of deconstruction which has often been noted by its critics as one of its greatest weaknesses: Morgan writes as a deconstructor of texts, who is herself an author writing a text with quite specific aims in mind, but who is also aware of the possibility of deconstructive readings of her own text.⁵ The way she does this highlights the ethical value of deconstruction, for here we see both the boldness and the humility of its program.

In the same way, Derrida confidently contributes works in the great tradition of Western philosophy - his immediate antecedents being Heidegger, Husserl and Nietzsche (as Kevin Hart, 1989, demonstrates in his book, *The Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction, Theology and Philosophy*) - whilst revealing that Western philosophy can never be completely certain of its own metaphysical foundations. This seems to me the only honest way to proceed for anyone who has the temerity to be a writer or teacher yet does not claim to be God. Here, we see an essential element of any ethics education program: the teacher must be willing to declare openly her own position together with her reasons for holding it, to point out that other positions exist, and to allow her students to question, discuss and arrive at their own rationally defensible and mutually acceptable positions. I should stress that by 'mutually acceptable' I do not necessarily mean that they should be the same. The minimum criterion should rather be: can we reasonably tolerate our disagreement and still maintain

⁵ I illustrate and discuss this paradox further in Chapter 1.3 and 5.

our community? Following from this, a second essential element is also apparent: the necessity of participating boldly and humbly in a community of inquiry if we hope to live together as best we can. This is the ethical ideal of democracy and possibly the only hope of resolving the conflicting values of the groups which make up our multi-cultural, pluralistic communities, whether local, national or international. Wendy Morgan recognises this when she says, 'In the course of this unit...my class and I have been developing into a kind of interpretive [sic] community...'. (84) I discuss the nature of such communities in more detail in Chapter 4.2.

Whilst I admire Morgan's book I remain unhappy about some aspects of it. For example there is the idea which it seems to present of the construction of the subject, whether that be the historical subject of Ned Kelly, the author's and reader's constructions of the author herself, the author and reader's constructions of the reader himself, our own construction of ourselves - or whatever other permutations are possible. In her introduction she quotes eminent Australian historian, Manning Clark, as saying,

There was no such person as Ned Kelly. Indeed, there is no such thing as a human being, in some ways. There is only what he thinks of himself at different periods of time and what other people think of him at different periods of time. (5)

Morgan then comments that 'any attempt to recover the person from the texts is a futile project. That is, it is impossible he could ever be present to us; instead there are endless possibilities for representing that figure.' (5) Earlier Morgan had said,

Yet other readers may wonder whether I'm describing an English or a History classroom, and whether my approaches aren't already being practised by History teachers, though perhaps without the underpinning of a post-structuralist literary theory. The boundaries in the curriculum between these subjects are largely a matter of convention and convenience; and certainly History and English have much in common as studies of culture... While many professional, academic historians now recognise the way language constitutes their subject and cannot be ignored (this is sometimes called the 'turn to textuality' or the 'textual turn' in the social sciences), in both English and History at the secondary level we still tend to ask of our texts, 'What does this mean?' instead of 'How does this mean?' - that is, what language, what discourses, what systems of belief, what cultural contexts encourage us to read into this a particular meaning? (4)

Here, and in what follows, Morgan has given a challenging demonstration of the possibilities of teaching History from a post-structuralist perspective, but I think she has practised a sleight of hand, and performed a disservice to both History and English, by exaggerating the similarities between the two disciplines. In fact Morgan passes too quickly over her hints that there

really do remain some differences between the truth claims of History and English - for she says that the boundaries between these two subjects are only *largely* a matter of 'convention and convenience'. I do not think that it is at all clear that fictional and historical narratives aim to construct the same kinds of truth. In fact History and English are different discourses. In the end the responsible historian is limited in the 'spin' which he can put on his retelling of the story of Ned Kelly by the evidence of his sources, textual and conflicting though they are, and by his knowledge that, in spite of Manning Clark's rhetoric, there really was such a person as Ned Kelly.

The writer of narrative fictions has different and arguably less limiting restrictions, depending partly on the genre of his work. Manning Clark's statement that 'there was no such person as Ned Kelly' is problematic in ways which Morgan remains silent about. Would Clark make the same kind of truth claim for the statement that there was no such person as Hamlet? And what can we make of Clark's further claim that 'there is no such thing as a human being...'? At least he qualifies it by adding, '...in some ways'. But here, in his use of the present tense and the pronoun 'us', Clark is referring to his readers and himself as much as to a figure from the past. And concerning this man of the past he goes on to say, 'There is only what he thinks of himself at different periods of time, and what other people think of him at different periods of time.' Clark is unduly emphatic about this claim - he does not say 'may be.' Yet the popular post-structuralist view that the subject is simply the construct of intersecting discourses, and that there is nothing which is not a text, is only a theory which is still being disputed - as I illustrate later in my discussion of some critics of post-structuralism. (Chapter 1.4) Clark's point appears to be a debased amalgamation of the Foucauldian view of the construction of the historical subject and some equating of this subject with a 'text' which can be subjected to a pseudo-Derridean deconstruction. He seems to be redefining 'human being' in just such an oddly disembodied fashion, yet humans do have a bodily existence, which I will argue influences their being in ways beyond the social discourses 'inscribed' in their bodies. (Chapter 2) As Shakespeare's Shylock says, making an impassioned plea for recognition of a common humanity outside the discourses of Judaism and Christianity: 'If you prick us do we not bleed?'

My chief concern here is not what Clark might have meant by his statement, but that Morgan adopts it too glibly as the epigraph for her unit of work. One result is that there is certainly a danger in her text that post-structuralism will be enshrined in the minds of the young and impressionable as the new orthodoxy - but she is acutely aware of this and tries to combat it as

shown above. More worrying is the possibility that, in spite of Morgan's ethical intentions, some of her students will go away believing that truths are simply fictions, that humans are merely unstable miasmas conjured up by fictional narratives, and that since nothing really exists outside one's own fantasies there is no need to exercise responsibility towards others. On the other hand, there is hope that the rich and partly extra-linguistic experience of communal endeavour under Morgan's benevolent tutelage will subvert this nihilistic construction of her text. But what might happen in some less thoughtful teacher's classroom?

Indeed, this question highlights a fundamental educational problem which arises out of Morgan's relatively cautious attempt to impose post-structuralist notions on her classes. At what age - if at all - should secondary students be given post-structuralist concepts without the supporting theory? Morgan clearly believes they should be spared the theory, since she spells out her severely simplified version only in an appendix for teachers, presumably because high school students are not old enough to understand it, but this also means that they do not have the breadth and depth of philosophical experience to test it. (Neither do many teachers, one might add.) It might be better, therefore, to engage students in philosophical discussions of a simpler nature before embarking on the notoriously bewildering difficulties of post-structuralist discourse. Perhaps in the final years of secondary school it would be enough to impart some introductory ideas about Marxism and structuralism, without which it is impossible to begin to understand post-structuralism. Indeed, it might be more sensible for Australian universities to adopt the common US model of postponing the treatment of post-structuralist literary theories until graduate programs. In Australia this might mean that post-structuralisms would be dealt with at the earliest in honours courses.

Brian Moon has written two books introducing post-structuralism to senior secondary students: *Studying Literature* (1990) and *Literary Terms: A Practical Glossary*. (1992) The first is satisfying in ways which the second is not. In both texts Moon adopts an easy, authoritative tone, addressing his readers as intelligent, free agents. In *Studying Literature* he leads a class through a series of activities which use mostly whole works by a wide variety of writers, and which are carefully structured to give the students an understanding of post-structuralist notions of the contested definitions of literature, of reading practices, and of reading in terms of gender. It is only after his students have engaged with particular texts in particular ways that he introduces post-structuralist and feminist terminology for the concepts and practices which he wishes to inculcate, such as 'dominant and marginalised ideas', 'reading

practices', 'gaps, silences and contradictions in literature', 'readings and re-readings', 'construction of readings', 'patriarchy', 'naturalising gender', 'intertextuality', 'de-centred', 'reading against the grain' and 'deconstructing the text'. At no stage does Moon invite students to resist his text, let alone supply them with concepts from alternative discourses with which to do so. Nor does he foreground his political or ethical aims in teaching students to use these reading practices. Instead he just gets on with the task in a mild and reasonable manner, an approach which is made to seem even more innocuous by his method of presenting students with whole works to read, asking many questions - only a very few of which are open-ended - and making extensive use of group discussion. These methods do allow students to come up with their own ideas but because the whole program is carefully structured there is no scope for pursuing different views very far. In practice, given a (perhaps rare) teacher who is well informed about the controversies surrounding literary theory, Moon's text might not prove too draconian, but instead a helpful starting point for a genuine community of inquiry in the classroom. In any case I doubt that Moon really expects teachers to work slavishly through the book. It is more likely that experienced practitioners will draw on it for examples of the kinds of things which could be done. However, there undoubtedly will be others - probably student-teachers - who will rely on Moon for all they need to know about post-structuralism, and in this situation one can only hope that they will learn enough to begin to ask what are the silences in his text and whose dissenting voices have been marginalised by his theory.

Moon's somewhat cosy impression that modern literary theory represents an unproblematic advance on its predecessors is even more prevalent in his later work, (1992) *Literary Terms: A Practical Glossary*. This is surprising, given the continued controversy over post-structuralism in Australia and elsewhere, and especially given that this time Moon includes an introduction which states:

The glossary is oriented towards concepts and issues rather than terms and 'facts'. Literature is not a body of objective knowledge, but a field of social practices in which people struggle to make meanings and exert influence. We could say that in literature study there are *only* issues. It is therefore important that we give our students the skills not simply to absorb literature and criticism but to interrogate it, and to consider the social functions of literary 'knowledge'.

With this aim in mind, the glossary includes not only 'analytic' terms, such as 'character' and 'imagery', but also brief accounts of some major critical orientations, such as structuralism, feminist criticism, and Marxist criticism. In thus acknowledging the differences within literary scholarship, the glossary aims to assist in the development of a democratic, active approach to the study of literary texts: an approach that will enable students to question the perspectives offered by literary and critical texts they encounter - including this one. (vii)

These are laudable sentiments - except perhaps for the notion 'that in literature study there are *only* issues': surely we are not arguing about the definition of iambic pentameter, for example? But I believe that Moon's aims are not adequately realised in his text. His audience is inexperienced and he practises on them in a too tendentious manner. No dictionary can escape bias entirely, but most try to be genuinely even-handed. Moon's glossary aims to be highly selective in the terms it includes: compare it, for example, to a full-scale glossary like *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (Cuddon, 1992) - and before I am accused of being unfair, I would argue that there is greater educational value in directing senior students to an adult dictionary which contains more information than they think they immediately need.

A glance at his contents page shows that Moon's glossary sets out to teach post-structuralism and those theories which are most closely related to it. Where others are introduced, such as New Criticism, it is mainly - but not entirely - to knock them down. In his individual entries Moon supplies little ground on which his student readers could gain sufficient confidence to resist his privileging of the latest theory over other approaches. For example, in commenting on New Criticism he seems to me to be guilty of pursuing the kind of ideological program which he accuses the New Critics of:

Modern theories see this search for unity and coherence as politically unacceptable. In arguing that their method revealed the 'true' meaning of literary works, the New Critics implied that other readers and other readings were wrong. This suggests a desire to reshape society in terms of the values and beliefs of one group of people. The New Critics also lacked an adequate theory of language. They failed to see that meaning is produced in the interaction between language users; it does not exist in the words themselves.

The New Critical movement has been very influential, however; and its emphasis on detailed study of the language and structure of texts is now a feature of most critical approaches. (80, 81)

Moon allows some good in New Criticism, but finds it politically incorrect; post-structuralism by implication is politically acceptable because it desires 'to reshape society in terms of the values and beliefs' of *more than one* group of people - but only so long as its ideological pluralism does not extend to an unbiased presentation of the claims of New Criticism. Not only does Moon make a large jump in suggesting that, because the New Critics' readings might be incomplete, misleading or erroneous, they must therefore be wanting to reshape society, but he might also be accused of hypocrisy. Yet in the latter claim perhaps I am being too hard on Moon. He is actually doing what ethics demands - but perhaps unconsciously, and there is the rub.

In a review of Charles Taylor's (1992) *The Ethics of Authenticity*, Richard Rorty (1993) says, with disturbing and perhaps extreme pragmatism,

...fellow-feeling degenerates into self-indulgent cant and political frivolity when we forget that some cultures, like some people, are no damn good; they cause too much pain, and so have to be resisted (and perhaps eradicated) rather than respected. This so-called 'politics of difference' pretends that both morality and politics can be reduced to niceness; it evades the thought that moral choice is sometimes a matter of deciding who is going to get hurt. (3)

This startling comment shows why open-minded members of a liberal democracy often feel uncomfortable with discussions about morality: it is a dangerous subject; with utilitarianism always hovering in the shadows debates can suddenly tip over into seemingly illiberal judgmentalism. And yet, as arguments about political correctness have been making clear, there are attitudes and behaviours which communities feel justified in condemning in the strongest terms, and at the same time there are real dangers in doing so. Moon's glossary would be a better book if he had recognised his 'ethical unconscious' and stated more clearly what his agenda is; and if he had included an entry on, and revised his whole work in the light of, 'ethical criticism' - by which I mean reading in an ethical manner, understanding the inherently ethical nature of language use, and reading to make sound judgements of the ethics of the text.

I want to look at one more aspect of Moon's glossary. In his entries entitled 'Author' and 'Character' he advances some by now familiar post-structuralist ideas about the construction of subjects both in texts and in life. However, perhaps because he does not have sufficient space to develop the ideas fully, or because he does not recognise the importance of fine distinctions, he too fails to leave room for the least degree of free will, moral responsibility, and communication between writer and reader. Post-structuralism is probably right in drawing our attention to how problematic these things are, but arguably wrong when it denies them entirely. Rorty, in the review quoted above, has something relevant to contribute here:

...we should keep reminding people that the selves to which they hope to be true are 'dialogical selves' - that we are what we are because of the people, real or imaginary, with whom we have talked. As Taylor says, 'We become full human agents, capable of understanding ourselves, and hence of defining an identity, through our acquisition of rich human languages of expression.'

The great merit of Taylor's... book... is the vigour with which he restates the point which Hegel (and later Dewey) urged against Rousseau and Kant: that we are only individuals in so far as we are social. None of us has a self to be faithful to except the one which has been cobbled together in interchanges with parents and siblings, friends and enemies, churches and governments. Even if we bring something new and idiosyncratic into the world, it will be at best a slight modification of what was already there. (3)

I draw attention to Taylor's use of the phrase 'dialogical selves' and the word 'agents', and to Rorty's admission that we may be able to 'bring something new and idiosyncratic into the world', be it ever so slight. These may seem subtle points, but they are significant in denying a picture of the writer and reader as totally constructed by forces outside their control. As I seek to demonstrate in Chapters 2 and 3, there remains a space, however limited, in which humans may be free to choose their courses of action and be held morally responsible for them. It is the same space in which teachers may be held morally responsible for entering into dialogue with their students about the ethical issues raised by narratives of all kinds. The Russian formalist scholar Mikhail Bakhtin (1973) has noted that the novel, as a 'dialogical' form (like plays and narrative films, one might add), is well suited to expressing social complexities, and that some novels do this better than others. He accuses Tolstoy of constructing 'monologic' novels in which only one point of view ultimately dominates, whereas Dostoevsky's works are 'dialogic' and therefore more ethically complex. Indeed, teaching morality and ethical judgement through stories has been a traditional role of education, and it remains no less so today despite the fact that it has been problematised and often marginalised by the influence of post-structuralist ideas upon critical literacy teaching.

In a 1994 issue of *English in Australia* Bronwen Mellor and Annette Patterson admit to feeling some anxiety about the fact that normative issues inescapably disrupt the desired, and supposedly free, play of interpretations in the post-structuralist classroom. Teachers, they note, do have political commitments (for example to freedom from discrimination on the basis of gender, class and race), and they do promote critical readings which support these views. Admitting this fact openly is the first step in developing an ethics of teaching ethical and political issues without excessive indoctrination. Vaughan Prain, (1996) in an essay entitled, "Readings by Request", takes up this issue, pointing out the contradiction inherent in adopting post-structuralist approaches to reading in promoting particular value positions under the aegis of teaching critical literacy. On the one hand, he says, theorists assume that students are free agents able to construct a variety of unconstrained readings in response to texts, while on the other they are seen as having been constructed as readers and as subjects by a variety of discourses. He cites Ian Hunter's (1994) argument that a major cause of the contradiction has been that teachers have failed to acknowledge that 'English education has necessarily been predominantly concerned with "pastoral surveillance", despite various rationales to the contrary'. (34) While Hunter has not proposed an overtly new rationale for English teaching, Prain points out that

he 'implies the need for English teachers to acknowledge more directly the nature of their work on students' subjectivities'. (34) Thus Prain welcomes Mellor and Patterson's admission that 'the aim of reading lessons is "to construct the reader as a social agent with particular capacities - such as that of producing feminist or anti-racist or plural readings of a text"'. (35) However, Prain notes that this amounts to a justification for gross indoctrination, and he suggests that a broader, more complex rationale for English teaching needs to be developed.

Such a rationale, he says, would begin with the recognition that literature teaching is centrally about the formation of particular values and subjectivities in students. However, it would also be concerned with 'the understanding and critique of (and, in some cases, empathetic engagement with) the values represented in texts'; 'developing a range of communicative skills and knowledge'; and understanding 'the bases of these values and the authorial choices through which these values are represented in texts'. Finally, he says, 'students also need to understand more clearly (and be able to evaluate) the values by which they judge others' values'. (36) Prain does not, however, offer a program of values education which would impart to students these ethical and meta-ethical capacities. All he does is offer some strategies for responding to texts which rely on the complex understandings needed in order to extend a literary text in the style of its author. I think Prain is right in supposing that this type of 'creative' response will engage students in subtle processes of empathising with, evaluating and criticising the values presented in the text, and that this would provide a more effective values education than simply demanding of students particular kinds of readings, such as a feminist reading. However, this strategy will not equip students with the possible justifications for particular moral positions, or the skills of reasoning needed to criticise or defend those positions. Yet it is precisely these skills and understandings which are required if students are going to make reasoned choices about the values which their schooling is inculcating in them. If students are to be offered an antidote to the moral indoctrination which it seems schools inevitably impose, then it is to be found in the theory and practice of ethics education - as will be made clear in the next section of the present chapter. In this way they will be enabled to become as nearly autonomous moral agents as it is possible for them to be.

James Gee (1994) is the only critical literacy theorist I am aware of who has recognised that the values which his practice implies need not only to be declared but also to have some sort of reasoned foundation. He concludes a paper entitled "Postmodernism and Literacies" with 'a consideration of how moral judgements and practices of resistance can be "validated" in the face of the pervasive postmodern rejection of claims to exclusivity and privilege on the

part of any social practice'. (271) Gee admits that there is no simple answer to this problem, yet the solution he offers is short, if not sweet. He proposes two fundamental conceptual principles governing human ethical discourse:

That something would *harm* someone else (deprive them of what they or the society they are in view as "goods") is *always* a good enough reason (though perhaps not a sufficient reason) *not* to do it...

One always has the ethical obligation to try to explicate (render overt and conscious) any social practice that there is reason to believe advantages oneself or one's group over other people or other groups. (292)

He then appeals to all human beings on the basis of their rationality to follow these principles. If after careful discussion some people reject them, then in his opinion they do not deserve to be honoured by the term 'human'. What should happen next Gee does not say, but some people (Richard Rorty perhaps?) might be quick to assume that when such a miscreant has been declared to be outside the human family he can justifiably be penned up like a dangerous animal or swatted like a fly. All Gee offers is this - perhaps ominous - observation: 'In the end we run out of words, and meaning is rooted finally in judgement and action'. (293) Gee may be right here, but the implications of his view require further discussion. Clearly exponents of critical literacy need to develop a comprehensive ethical foundation for their practices, and to link this with a program of moral and ethical education which allows students to participate in the decisions which are being made about the values that they are expected to display. In the next section of this chapter I examine a workable model for ethics education, particularly through literacy teaching, and in subsequent sections I look more deeply at the strengths and weaknesses of post-structuralism as a theoretical foundation for such practice.

2. The hegemony of morals and the necessity of ethics education

It is clear that we make value judgements constantly and, indeed, that it is impossible to function in life without discriminating between likes and dislikes, good and bad, better and best, beautiful and ugly, and so on. In *The Long-Legged Fly: a Theology of Language and Desire*, Don Cupitt (1987) argues that, as biological organisms, our most fundamental response to the phenomena of our environment is a binary ranking of those phenomena in order of their value to us, or in other words, of whether they 'turn us on or off'. He goes on to show how these binary rankings are further articulated by human culture into elaborate patterns of scaling, particularly in the structure of language. By such means moral values - socially accepted standards of right and wrong, which have proved useful in organising viable communities - emerge within the various discourses of every culture and become enshrined in their languages. Valuing is therefore a fundamental human activity, and ethics - a later development of civilised societies - is the study of how, why and on what criteria human beings unconsciously and consciously make distinctions between right and wrong. Many such moral judgements have, of course, already been made for us by our society, and as we grow up we internalise these assumptions as rules of conduct. Thus morals exercise a hegemony over our attitudes and behaviour, and it is only through their conscious re-examination in the study of ethics that we can judge the validity and appropriateness of the particular moral obligations which shape our lives. In this light it is clear that values education, and in particular ethics education, ought to be seen as highly important in schooling, especially in a society dominated by cultural pluralism and rapid change.

In his book, *Values Education in Australian Schools*, Brian Hill (1991) argues for the centrality and, indeed, *inescapability* of values education:

...schooling is not a neutral process because...it represents something which adult society values...

Having set out on the path of intervention, adult society then develops a curriculum which inevitably exercises a powerful influence on students. Apart from anything else they might learn, students get the message that, in the things which it includes and excludes, the curriculum mirrors the priorities which the community sets on things such as personal worth, job preparation, 'the basics', 'the disciplines', the rights of minorities, and so on.

Values education goes on, therefore, even when we are not consciously planning for it. But when its effect is not acknowledged or controlled, the result is often that wrong values for life are propagated by default. In schools where the emphasis is on learning subjects to gain good marks in order to beat others into higher education and better jobs, students are encouraged to develop a very self-centred and consumer-oriented value system. (3)

These sentiments will come as no surprise to teachers of English who in recent years have been reading in their national journal, *English in Australia*, that all teaching is political, that all texts are ideological, and that teachers should help students to understand how their notions of gender, class and race have been constructed. However, Hill's discussion extends the scope of values education beyond politics and the undoubtedly important issues of gender, class and race: he analyses the nature of values, identifying their cognitive, affective and volitional elements; he shows how we can avoid the extremes of either teaching preferred values as facts or, at the opposite pole, of representing all value judgements as entirely subjective; and he suggests how values can themselves be taught ethically in a secular, pluralist democracy. An important component of Hill's values education program is his notion of 'committed impartiality', whereby the teacher models the adult responsibility to adopt reasoned attitudes and to live by them, while remaining open to rational persuasion to change them. Thus Hill encourages teachers to declare their own views at appropriate moments during class discussion, whilst giving fair representation to opposing views and encouraging students to reason together in order to shape their opinions.

With these ideas in mind, Hill maintains that values education should seek, as a minimum specification:

1. to enable students
 - (a) to acquire a representative knowledge base concerning the value traditions which have helped to form contemporary culture;
 - (b) to enter with empathy into the perceptions and feelings of people who have been strongly committed to these traditions;
 - (c) to develop skills of critical and appreciative values appraisal;
 - (d) to develop and put into practice the skills of decision making and value negotiation; and
2. it should enable them to develop a concern for the community and the care of its members. (10)

Thus for Hill values education goes beyond teaching how to recognise and criticise our own and others' values, to include the encouragement to *adopt* values such as empathy, tolerance and care - in other words, those minimal or procedural values which, he maintains, allow a secular, pluralist democracy to flourish and transform itself into a better society. This is another situation where Hill believes that the need to make a judgement about fundamental values is inescapable. Society simply cannot function without some agreed values, but the question then arises as to which values will provide society with the best foundation. Hill summarises the various meta-ethical theories on which ethical systems have been based to demonstrate that even at this level choices have to be made. Thus, for example, C.S. Lewis (1967) in *The Abolition of Man, or Reflections on Education with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in*

the Upper Forms of Schools makes a case for the existence of a Natural Law which is the *a priori* foundation of morality in the same way as axioms are the foundation of mathematics and science. His choice is therefore a deontological rather than a utilitarian approach to ethics as the basis for education. My own choice, which I will attempt to justify in Chapter 2, is for a version of ethics founded on evolutionary principles but foreshadowing a possible synthesis with some postmodern and metaphysical ideas.

Hill's book explores the ethical foundations of values education in considerable though not exhaustive depth, taking care to anticipate and answer many questions which immediately arise. For example, in a chapter entitled 'Exploring Multiculturalism', Hill argues that, 'A policy of Multiculturalism in education requires that the multicultural perspective infuse all studies in the school curriculum.' (84) He then suggests ways in which this might be applied in, among other disciplines, Literary Studies:

I would argue that the stranglehold of what is classically termed 'English Literature' must be broken. As a core subject it has never been particularly suitable to an Anglo-Celt in Australia. Only a few decades ago, in fact, it excluded any reference to literary products outside the United Kingdom, even from Australia. If it was inadequate then as a core study, the 'Eng. Lit.' approach is all the more unsuitable now in a multicultural situation.

A richer interchange of literary products from many cultures should form the basis of core studies in literature. This does not invalidate, however, the desirability of including specifically British literature in the elective range. It would be short-sighted not to make it possible for students at all levels to encounter a body of literature which has so substantially affected the culture which we now regard as Australian.

A further reform is called for. Standard teaching approaches in literary studies have tended to reflect the somewhat over-refined casuistry of an intellectual elite rather than the interests of all people in the literary communication of finer perceptions and feelings. A particular kind of rational-critical analysis, impregnated with the doctrine that one should not allow moral or cultural valuations to intrude, has choked off the interest of many a student in good literature.

One of the greatest gains from the competent teaching of literature - from any source - is an increase in the powers of empathy and sensitivity to human motivations. Similarly, relating literature to its place and time makes the experience more vivid. Both of these aspects, neglected in the over-refined version of 'Eng. Lit.', become particularly important when one is also hoping for gains in multicultural understanding. (88)

I have quoted this example at length because of its immediate interest to English teachers, and because it demonstrates clearly that a stimulating critique of the aims and methods of English can be gained when viewed in the wider context of values education. Of course only one aspect of values education is being considered here, the ethic of multi-culturalism (a value which has itself been hotly debated in Australia in recent times). Also Hill's critique is neither entirely new nor unexceptionable. In fact, Hill reveals in his third and fourth paragraphs that the teaching of English is somewhat beyond his expertise. The confusions

which abound there are at the heart of the difficulties of teaching literature in schools, yet on the one hand the English departments in universities are usually not interested in these school problems, and on the other the general public just want from literature 'a good read.' It is left to academics in departments of education and to teachers to confront the problems largely by themselves. And increasingly, new teachers will have come through academic departments which have promoted only 'theory' and/or 'cultural studies', often without ethical investigation. Thus it is very important for those who do recognise the need to help students to undertake a radical appraisal of the values implicit in the texts they study, to have a broad philosophical and educational justification for what they are doing. This is just what Hill supplies.

In the light of the use of a form of deconstruction by the post-structuralist educationists discussed above to expose the ideology inherent in a text, a more relevant example might be Hill's answer to the question, 'Should Religion be Taught?' After describing some approaches to teaching religion which proved in practice to be failures, and after making his own recommendations, he says that

...religious studies, properly taught, inevitably encourage the development of a critical consciousness, and this is one of the most widely accepted goals of a general education. To recognise when truth claims are being made, to appreciate the differences between entertaining beliefs and claiming to know, to understand the part played in human thought by presuppositions and theoretical models: all these are antidotes for the one-dimensional culture trap we spoke of earlier. (60)

Hill goes on to deal with the objection that the teaching of a variety of faiths, or ideologies, can lead to the promotion of relativism and agnosticism. He counters this by arguing that Australian educators are *justified* in promoting democratic values and highlighting their Judaic and Christian roots. In support of this perhaps controversial view, he debunks two common misconceptions: first, that it is possible to construct a neutral curriculum and, second, that all religions are equal in their moral implications. He then goes on to point out that societies cannot function without an agreed set of values, and in Australia those values have been drawn from the Judaeo-Christian religious tradition, together with the Graeco-Roman democratic ideal which provides for the orderly adjustment of our values to suit changing circumstances and attitudes. Here is another useful discussion for English teachers, for while they may pay lip-service to the notion that all teaching is political and that not all ideologies are equally good (certainly Marxists and feminists will concur), I suggest that they may not be very expert at justifying their values, or of teaching their students how to make well-founded value judgements. In other words, to the extent that teachers'

values are unexamined in the light of an understanding of ethics and values education they may be guilty of unduly manipulating and indoctrinating their students.

Hill's discussion of teaching English and religious studies touches on an issue which is at the very heart of any discussion of the ethical and political roles of literary and cultural studies, and of critical social literacy: that of the literary (and religious) canon. Clearly Hill's view is that students should be introduced to the ideas and cultural practices which have shaped our mainstream social values, but he also thinks that students should understand the stories and beliefs of minority groups within our culture and of other traditions outside it, in order to encourage both critical consciousness and multicultural understanding. In this way he hopes to avoid inculcating the twin extremes of moral relativism and intolerance of cultural differences. Traditionally the literary canon has been invoked to counter the first extreme by upholding the moral and other values of the Western tradition, especially after the failure of Christianity in the second half of the nineteenth century. But latterly the canon has been attacked and largely jettisoned in schools and cultural studies departments to counter the other extreme of intolerance of difference. Thus in recent times the traditional literary canon has been blamed for entrenching hegemonies of class, race, gender and sexuality, and has been replaced by texts which express the interests of diverse groups in our increasingly pluralist society, including women, aborigines, migrants, punks and gays. Furthermore the canon has been expanded to encompass popular texts which express the desires of ordinary members of the community and/or the (exploitative?) interests of powerful media and marketing conglomerates. In this movement it is clear why departments of literary studies are being replaced in universities by departments of cultural studies, and why an older model of English literature teaching in schools is being replaced by that of critical social literacy. In both sectors of education the teaching of the 'core values' of society through a canon of what Matthew Arnold called 'the best that has been thought and known' (Gribble, Ed., 1967: 116) is being supplanted by teaching the politics of literacy. Often, though, the political agendas being pursued are narrowed in focus by unexamined notions of political correctness, and politics is seen reductively as a power struggle designed to assert the rights of particular groups. Politics, however, can also be about negotiating shared values and defining common responsibilities, and thus is intimately related to ethics.

When one looks at the passage of *Culture and Anarchy* in which Arnold's memorable phrase occurs, it is also easy to see why his canon is now frequently and unfairly caricatured as representing a monolithic moral code

which upholds the hegemony of the ruling class while pretending to serve egalitarian motives:

[Culture] does not try to teach down to the level of inferior classes; it does not try to win them for this or that sect of its own, with ready-made judgements and watchwords. It seeks to do away with classes; to make the best that is thought and known in the world current everywhere; to make all men live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light, where they may use ideas, as it uses them itself, freely, - nourished, and not bound by them. (Gribble, Ed., 1967: 116)

The literary canon, while certainly narrow, has never been ideologically monolithic (as Harold Bloom, 1994, demonstrates in his book, *The Western Canon*) and it would be a case of constructing a straw man to claim that it was. On the other hand, we can now see that Arnold's program of cultural education promotes a form of meritocracy where those who are able and willing to benefit by becoming cultured in his terms are welcomed into the ruling class, while those who are not must remain inferior. However, it is unfair to dismiss Arnold's motives as hypocritical since he was as much a product of his age as we are of ours. His idea of culture and of what was best within it was certainly narrow by our standards, but his conception of education was conditioned by Romantic notions of the perfectibility of man, and his idea of class had not yet been subjected to Karl Marx's influence, even though the two men were contemporaries.

Moreover, it does not behove proponents of cultural studies to feel superior to Arnold, as if they were inhabitants of a more advanced era. The motive behind the movement to cultural studies and critical social literacy is the same moral impulse as Arnold's: a concern for social justice. And the movement itself, as I have been arguing, appears to be as ethically naive in the light of Hill's approach to values education as Arnold's idealistically egalitarian program of education seems politically naive in the light of the neo-Marxism which informs so much of post-structuralism and cultural studies today. There is a line of historical development which links Arnold's ideas with those of critical social literacy teachers. Yet one difference between them is that Arnold's optimism about the power of a moral education to reform society, combined with his political naivety, has been replaced by an optimism about the power of a political education and direct political action, combined with an ethical naivety. Another difference is that Arnold's idea is driven by aesthetic and humanist principles, whereas cultural studies is driven by economics and psychoanalysis. One thing which they both have in common, however, is that narratives play important roles in their educational programs, albeit with different emphases.

It is not necessary to rehearse here all of that complex, century-long phase in the development of the role of literature in society and of the teaching

of English in universities and schools from Arnold to the present day, since it has been done by others (including F.R. Leavis, Raymond Williams, Richard Hoggart and Terry Eagleton.) In very broad outline such a history begins in the second half of the nineteenth century with the failure of Christianity, under the influences of Romanticism and Darwinian science, to provide an absolute foundation for morality. The influence of Darwin is illustrated in my discussion in Chapter 3 of A.S. Byatt's dramatic reworking of this theme in her novella, 'Morpho Eugenia' (although I have held my discussion over until then because her text is one of several which I also want to analyse in the light of the evolutionary, postmodern and metaphysical ethics introduced in Chapter 2). This history also includes Thomas Arnold's shaping of the English public school as the training ground for administrators of the British Empire, and his son Matthew Arnold's proposal that the moral education of these young men could be effected by their exposure not only to the Greek and Roman classics, but also to the 'best' of traditional and contemporary English and European literature. In the absence of Christian foundations creative writers, such as the late Dickens, Conrad and Hardy, produced novels which have a strong element of moral questioning - a development which I illustrate in some detail in Chapter 3 in my study of Conrad's novella, *Heart of Darkness*. F.R. Leavis's (1949) idea of 'the Great Tradition' built on this criterion of moral questioning and extended the canon to include D.H. Lawrence through a Fabian-socialist-Marxist reworking of Christian morality. Raymond Williams (1958) continued the Marxist critique which was subsequently taken up by critics like Terry Eagleton (1984) in the UK and Fredric Jameson (1981) in the US, who combined it with French post-structuralism, which had itself been directly conditioned by post-war European Marxism (as well as by Nietzschean philosophy and Saussurean linguistics). The postmodern novel is of course one literary expression of this development, as I illustrate in Chapter 3 in my discussion of Aidan Chambers' young adult fiction, *Breaktime*. The ethico-political traditions of feminism and gay liberation are intertwined in this history as well - through, for example, such early figures as Virginia Woolf and E.M. Forster - and these traditions too have drawn latterly upon a combination of neo-Marxist and post-structuralist theories.

Thus it is clear that Arnold's and Marx's concern for moral education, however oppositionary in some ways, have been transformed into our contemporary political agendas. What is not so apparent perhaps is why ethics, which ought to be seen as integral with politics, has been marginalised in this process. Fredric Jameson (1981: 114) provides one answer to this question by claiming that ethics has become implicated in the oppressive regime of the

dominant power group.⁶ Another answer might be found in tracing the tradition of aestheticism, culminating in the view that art has nothing to do with morality, from the German Romantics through Coleridge, Walter Pater and Oscar Wilde. A later influence on literary studies which marginalised both ethical and political concerns was the New Criticism. This was itself a kind of aestheticism and shared its prioritising of close reading of the text independently of its authorial context with post-structuralism. Another important factor was the influence of logical positivism and linguistic philosophy in English thought, particularly with the view that ethical and aesthetic propositions are simply expressions of emotion rather than statements of fact.

It is significant, however, that in the decades of the 1960s to the 1980s, when English literary studies largely abandoned ethical in favour of political criticism, there has been a burgeoning of interest in ethics among philosophers, so much so that Peter Singer (1994: 2) claims that substantial progress has been made in ethics in our time. Moreover there has been a growing interest by some philosophers in the role played by stories in ethics from the Classical period, through Kant, to the present day. In his book *Ethics, Theory and the Novel* David Parker (1994) traces this 'turn to ethics'. He maintains, for example, that the American philosopher Martha Nussbaum 'goes further than Rorty in treating literature not merely as a sort of servant of ethics ('helping' it to do its job), but as itself moral philosophy.' (34) This, he says, is a theme which informs all her work, including especially (1990) *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. Another important contribution to this development has been made by Tobin Siebers' (1992) book, *Morals and Stories*, in which he argues a case against the curious history of linguistic ethics from G.E. Moore to J. Hillis Miller before turning to a detailed study of 'stories with morals' in the works of Homer, Plato, Kant, Austen, Tolstoy and Achebe. Siebers' ethical criticism brilliantly re-establishes for our time the age-old link between ethics, literature and moral instruction.

The exploration of this link - especially of the idea that literature can itself be a form of moral philosophy - is central to the aims of my study. Thus it seems appropriate at this point to invite the reader to do what many readers are prone to do - and what postmodern texts (for example 'hypertext' documents) are sometimes constructed to facilitate: namely to jump ahead at any time in order to read part or all of Chapter 3. There many of the theoretical points made in Chapters 1 and 2 are illustrated - more readily perhaps, depending upon the

⁶ Jameson's claim perhaps applies better to morality as I have defined it. However, as I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 2, evolutionary psychology lends support to Jameson's view, even in regard to ethics which could be seen as the rationalisation of evolved moral values for self-interested ends.

reader's taste - by my discussion of the works of fiction by Conrad, Chambers and Byatt which I have mentioned above.

In the context of the changing role, and hence the composition, of the canon Hill's program of values education seems much more judicious than that of most proponents of cultural studies and critical social literacy. He is certainly in favour of broadening the range of texts to be studied in schools and universities along the lines of cultural studies curricula, but not in favour of abandoning those texts which have in the past shaped our society for good and ill. And while he is committed to a political agenda, it is a much more openly democratic one than that of the ethically unexamined and all too tendentious politics which often characterises cultural studies and critical literacy. The great problem with Hill's approach is ultimately a practical one: how to cover all of this diverse content in a way which will support a happy balance between informing students about the nature of the culture(s) which they have inherited, inculcating in them those moral values which society has for the time being decided will serve all of its citizens better than those of the past, and educating them in those critical and creative skills - including the skills of ethics - which will empower them to reshape society in the future. Nevertheless, practicalities aside, it is clear that teachers need still more theory in their pedagogy - and not just literary theory, radical or otherwise. I am arguing that what they need most urgently just now is ethics, and a philosophy and methodology of values education such as Hill has supplied. From this perspective they will then be in a better position to evaluate the truth claims and the ethical and political implications of post-structuralist literary theories for the teaching of literature. The urgency of this undertaking will become apparent in the remainder of this chapter as I look more closely at post-structuralism and its critics. In the next section I analyse an essay by Stanley Fish in order to illustrate the paradoxical nature of poststructuralism and its propensity to obviate all possible criticisms before they start. I follow this in the subsequent section with a summary of a variety of criticisms of poststructuralism which do have some purchase.

3. Post-structuralism versus metaphysics: play of opposites?

In an essay entitled 'Rhetoric', Stanley Fish (1990) outlines the long history of the debate between rhetorical and 'philosophical' (i.e. metaphysical, particularly realist) views of knowledge. Fish's discussion begins with the attack on the sophists by Socrates and Plato, and ends with the apparent ascendancy of the rhetorical in post-structuralist literary theory and antifoundationalist ethics. On the way he cites, as one example of the reinstatement of rhetoric in our time, the work of the sociologist of science, Thomas Kuhn, (1962) in his famous book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. Yet Fish overstates Kuhn's view of the social construction of scientific paradigms. Indeed, he only mentions in passing that Kuhn and others have denied that scientific knowledge is developed in a manner which 'leaves us in a world of epistemological anarchy'. (211)⁷ Kuhn's book is often called upon to support the popular post-structuralist view of science as simply another discourse, one with no greater claim to truth than any other, but this is to ignore other work in the philosophy of science.⁸

Fish concludes his essay by declaring that it is impossible to decide between the conflicting epistemological stances of rhetoric and metaphysics. To summarise the conflict he has described, he offers 'the last word' to Richard Rorty, a philosopher who, Fish reminds us, 'is himself a champion of the anti-essentialism that underlies rhetorical thinking': (221)

There...are two ways of thinking about various things... The first...thinks of truth as a vertical relationship between representations and what is represented. The second...thinks of truth horizontally - as the culminating reinterpretation of our predecessors' reinterpretation of their predecessors' reinterpretation... It is the difference between regarding truth, goodness, and beauty as eternal objects which we try to locate and reveal, and regarding them as artifacts whose fundamental design we often have to alter. (221)

After deferring to Rorty in having the last word, Fish apparently cannot resist adding a final gloss of his own: 'It is the difference between serious man and rhetorical man. It is the difference that remains.' (222) As Fish has acknowledged, Rorty has found it necessary, at least in practice, to choose between the binary oppositions he has described, and to construct a neo-pragmatist, anti-foundationalist ethics. But Fish has earlier argued that any such

⁷ Paul Churchland (1995) comments that 'Kuhn is decidedly conservative in his methodological impulses... [He] was not attacking scientific standards. Rather, he was attacking a false and confabulatory *theory* about the nature of scientific standards, a worthy and non-trivial philosophical theory called Logical Empiricism, a theory which tried to capture all such standards in narrowly logical terms.' (276)

⁸ See especially Karl Popper's (1979) evolutionary epistemology, which I invoke again in Chapter 2. A useful discussion of Kuhn's work in relation to more recent developments in the philosophy of science can be found in Keith Windschuttle's (1994) *The Killing of History*.

choice will ultimately veer back in the opposite direction. (221) It seems that he repeats this idea when he says, 'It is the difference that remains', thereby invoking Derrida's famous pun contained in his neologism, *différance*. Hence neither the rhetorical nor the metaphysical view can be held finally: while they always already differ, they always already defer to one another. If anything can be held to be certain, it is this radical uncertainty, undecidability, inconclusiveness. Here, as Fish is well aware, he is rehearsing the central paradox of post-structuralism: that the certainty of uncertainty is itself uncertain and so, according to Fish, we are led back to the certainties of metaphysics only to find that they in turn become uncertain again.

Fish's view of our epistemological quandary may be all very well for the theorist in his study, unconcerned with the choices forced upon the practitioner. However, if he is right, there are at least two practical implications about which he is silent, one clearly healthy and the other somewhat ambiguous. First, his undecidability thesis entails a perennial scepticism which is surely a necessary hygiene for the worldly philosopher engaged in the praxis of politics, criticism, creative writing, teaching, making moral judgements and so on. Whether this philosophical practitioner chooses rhetoric or metaphysics (or some synthesis in between) as his guide - and choose he must, as the example of Richard Rorty demonstrates - it will be better if he remembers that in Fish's world of undecidability all such commitments are finally a leap in the dark. Has not post-structuralism notoriously argued that totalising philosophies - such as the whole project of Western metaphysics - have a propensity ultimately to tip over into totalitarianism by suppressing the dissenting silences and contradictions lurking beneath their beguiling surfaces? Such scepticism is therefore surely salutary - after all, would we not prefer every fanatic to admit that he might just possibly be wrong?

But in saying this, have not I already deserted Fish's pose of lofty detachment as the historian of ideas, and plumped for the pragmatism of the antifoundationalist? At first sight Fish doesn't seem to have gone this far in his article, for he is careful to appear admirably non-committal. Yet - and here I come to the second, disturbing, implication of Fish's view - in admitting that there is an alternative to foundationalism, and especially in declaring that the dispute between them is undecidable, has not Fish already predisposed himself *always* to adopt the rhetorical line in the moment when he puts his Olympian insight into practice? Merely to say, 'It is the difference that remains', is instantly more than an observation - it suggests a commitment, a cry of, *Vive la différence!* If this is so, Fish is not as detached as he seems, for his apparently unbiased description is now revealed as the old rhetoric thinly disguised as

impartiality and even more subversive than he pretends. Adopt a radical undecidability as an alternative and it sweeps the field clean: farewell metaphysics forever, enter the totalitarianism of post-structuralism. Accept Fish's account of the inevitability of the self-deconstruction of knowledge - his undecidability thesis - and the only way back will have to be via the deconstruction of deconstruction. But that is an endlessly recursive process in which deconstruction has the first and last word. Take this way and, of course, there is no way back at all. We will not only have dismissed metaphysics forever, but we will already have passed the brink of scepticism - which at least entertains the *possibility* that metaphysics provides a place to stand - and be falling into the bottomless abyss of nihilism where there is nothing left for it but to learn to hold hands in the rush of air.

Is this an overly gloomy view of the triumph of post-structuralism? Let me lighten it a little by extending the metaphor of free fall. In our immediate environment falling is only fatal if there is *terra firma* beneath and one's parachute does not open. In a bottomless abyss, or in the zero gravity of space, parachutes are not necessary and free fall can be exciting for those who master its possibilities. Likewise, I do not think that a world without epistemological foundations is impossible to live in reasonably happily and responsibly. (Once again the example of Richard Rorty will suffice for the moment.) On the other hand, far off in space there are said to be singularities known as black holes: falling into one of them would almost certainly be fatal! Perhaps the same could be said of falling into the *mise-en-abîme* of deconstruction.

What concerns me most about some practising post-structuralists in English and education departments is that realist or idealist (i.e. foundationalist) philosophies seem to have been ruled completely out of the question. It is especially disturbing to meet what I am tempted to call 'post-structuralist fundamentalists'⁹ who scorn their realist colleagues as 'uninitiated' or as 'residual humanists'. Fortunately such scoffers are rare but, from what I have said above in questioning post-structuralism's claim to open-endedness, there does seem to be in post-structuralism - as in all of the '-isms' it delights in deconstructing - a tendency towards an oppressive totalitarianism. It is against this possibility that I want to join such eminent critics as Harold Bloom (1994) and Wayne Booth (1988) in reviving the kind of healthy scepticism which would allow that even latter-day Platonists, such as Roger Penrose (1990, 1995) or Iris Murdoch (1992), *might* be right. Later I will return to their seemingly antiquated claims, but my main aim in this study is more modest than theirs: I want to restore hope

⁹ An oxymoron with which even those poststructuralists most devoted to paradox would not want to be labelled.

in the possibility of accepting that some truths may exist independently of discourse by bringing the insights of evolutionary epistemology into the discussion - but more of that in Chapter 2.

I have been arguing that this hope is ruled out if one accepts, without scepticism, Fish's strong view that there is a radical difference between rhetoric and metaphysics, that here we have a binary opposition always already in the process of deconstruction. Fish has been at pains to present the difference in these terms, ostensibly to redress the negative connotations from which the term rhetoric has so often suffered, and to make clear its status as an alternative which has an *equal* claim upon our allegiance. In fact, I think he has gone further than that and has *reversed* the old privileging of metaphysics over rhetoric in a new privileging of undecidability over decidability. However, Fish has already pointed to what I think is a viable way around the black hole of deconstruction which he has thus (inadvertently?) opened up. Earlier in his essay he discussed the plea of leftist critics such as Terry Eagleton for the employment of rhetoric in the cause of creating a more just society. (216) And prior to that Fish drew attention to what he subsequently dismissed as a weaker defence of rhetoric against the realist attack - that of Aristotle:

First [Aristotle] defines rhetoric as a faculty or art whose practice will help us to observe "in any given case the available means of persuasion" (1355b) and points out that as a faculty it is not in and of itself inclined away from truth. Of course, bad men may abuse it, but that, after all, "is a charge which may be made in common against all good things." "What makes a man a 'sophist'," he declares, "is not his faculty, but his moral purpose."

Aristotle's second defence is more aggressively positive and responds directly to one of the most damaging characterisations of rhetoric: "We must be able to employ persuasion ... on opposite sides of a question, not in order that we may in practice employ it in both ways (for we must not make people believe what is wrong) but in order that we may see clearly what the facts are" (1355a). In short, properly used, rhetoric is a heuristic, helping us not to distort the facts but to discover them; the setting forth of contrary views of a matter will have the beneficial effect of showing us which of those views most accords with the truth. By this argument, as Peter Dixon has pointed out (1971, 14), Aristotle "removes rhetoric from the realm of the haphazard and the fanciful" and rejoins it to that very realm of which it was said to be the great subverter.

But if this is the strength of Aristotle's defence, it is also its weakness, for in making it he reinforces the very assumptions in relation to which rhetoric will always be suspect, assumptions of an independent reality whose outlines can be perceived by a sufficiently clear-eyed observer who can then represent them in transparent verbal medium. The stronger defence, because it hits at the heart of the opposing tradition, is one that embraces the accusations of that tradition and makes of them a claim. (206)

It is along the lines of Aristotle's 'weaker' defence of rhetoric that I want to pursue my assessment of the possibilities for an ethically responsible employment of a revised post-structuralism in the search for 'an independent reality'. In doing so I maintain that post-structuralism tends to recognise only the

recursive construction and deconstruction of binary oppositions whereas it might be more realistic to see a range of positions between extremes. In this case it exaggerates the problem of referentiality in language at the same time as it quite properly reminds us of the dangers of assuming we know more than we do. Viewing language as a *semi*-transparent medium, it seems to me, offers a way forward in establishing an ethics of criticism and the teaching of English - not exactly a middle way between foundationalism and antifoundationalism, but a modest one. It opens up the possibility of identifying some tentative foundations for ethics in an external reality which is knowable and communicable to the degree allowed by a healthy, systematic scepticism. Thus I am not advocating, as Fish *seems* to be, that one must accept that there is never any deciding between the equal and contradictory claims of post-structuralism and metaphysics; nor am I advocating, as I think Fish actually does, that, no matter how detached one might like to be in theory, one must accept the inevitable slide into the black hole of deconstruction in practice; nor indeed am I advocating that one must commit oneself, by an act of faith informed by reason, to a thoroughgoing realism, and stalwartly resist all the 'evil' blandishments of post-structuralism. All of these seem to me unnecessarily extreme positions. What exactly I *am* advocating will become clearer in the next section as I outline some trenchant criticisms of post-structuralist ideas, and in the subsequent section where I begin to define what can be salvaged from among them.

4. Post-structuralism and its critics

I turn now to several critiques of post-structuralist theories in order to support my argument that claims concerning the non-referentiality of texts and the discursive construction of the self are frequently exaggerated. It is mainly these claims which have given rise to the problematic implications of post-structuralism for ethics and ethical education which I have outlined above. In order to keep the content of this study within reasonable bounds, I will illustrate the more widely ranging scope of the critiques I have selected by focussing, for the most part, on what they have to say about post-structuralism, especially the practice of deconstruction as developed by Derrida and his followers, and the problems they raise for ethical and political criticism.

One of the earliest and most stringent attacks on deconstruction has been made by M.H. Abrams in his now famous essay, 'The Deconstructive Angel'. (1977) David Lodge, in his introduction to this essay, says that 'Abrams' most telling argument is perhaps his claim that, in their own discursive practice, deconstructionists rely on the communicative power of language which they theoretically deny'. Lodge then comments that 'the deconstructionists' reply is that such paradoxes and contradictions are to be found everywhere in language as soon as one probes beneath the surface'. (Lodge, 1988: 264) Thus, if we consider the deconstructionists' response, deconstruction might appear to be impregnable: Abrams tries to destroy deconstruction by deconstructing it, thereby demonstrating the usefulness and truth of deconstruction. Here we see an early example of what has become a familiar impasse in the continuing confrontation between the rationalist position of humanists and the anti-rationalist position of post-structuralists: one side says that post-structuralism is self-contradictory and therefore invalid, and the other says that contradiction and the invalidity of all argument are features of the very nature of discourse, so we had better learn to live with them. There is, of course, no way forward here. However, it seems to me that the main force of Abrams' attack lies in his contention that deconstruction, at least as it was practised in the US at the time, overstates the difficulties of writers in communicating their meaning to their readers.

Richard Freadman and Seumas Miller (1992) in their book, *Re-Thinking Theory: A critique of contemporary literary theory and an alternative account*, provide a clear example of the collision between the rationalist and anti-rationalist positions. They adopt a 'theorised' humanist position and mount an extremely scathing attack on Althusserian Marxist theory, and Derridean and

Foucauldian post-structuralism. They point out that the program of social reform engaged in by Marxist or feminist literary critics depends upon a notion of the substantial self as a moral agent, and upon a notion of texts as being able to refer to the real world. Yet the post-structuralist elements of contemporary literary theory specifically contradict these notions. In Derrida's case Freadman and Miller analyse, in logical and empirical terms, three of his doctrines which they claim are identified with the ills of 'constructivist anti-humanism', as they like to call the kind of post-structuralism they oppose. The doctrines are: the repudiation of referentiality in language; the denial of the substantial self; and the dissolution of evaluative discourse, both aesthetic and moral. Their critique is rigorously logical, as this example illustrates:

As we see it, Derrida's argument for the indeterminacy of meaning is as follows: (1) if a sign has a determinate meaning then the meaning of that sign is present to a speaker or hearer; (2) if the meaning of a sign is wholly relational and essentially contextual then that meaning is not present to any speaker or hearer; (3) the meaning of any sign is wholly relational and essentially contextual; (4) from premises (2) and (3)) the meaning of any sign is not present to any speaker or hearer; (5) from (1) and (4)) the meaning of a sign is not determinate. This argument is valid. Are the premises true? Let us look in turn at premises (1), (2) and (3). (126)

Freadman and Miller go on to do just that, considering as fairly as they can the empirical and logical evidence for Derrida's premises. These doctrines fare badly under such analysis since Freadman and Miller find them to be logically incoherent and contrary to experience.

Freadman and Miller do, however, find some good among what they regard as bad in the advent of contemporary literary theory, as this comment in their introduction shows:

Constructivist anti-humanism, and contemporary literary theory in general, has succeeded in presenting itself as radically innovative. In some respects this is no doubt the case, and we do not wish to deny that important advances have in some instances been made, especially in areas such as feminist and post-colonial literary studies. We hope that our respect for some of these advances, and for the social, political and ethical concerns that motivate them, will be apparent in the pages that follow. Nor do we wish to deny that, as a result of some recent developments in literary theory, certain habitual critical assumptions have usefully been challenged. (9)

However, they go on to warn of the disturbingly illiberal face of so much post-structuralist practice, a totalitarian impulse which I have noted in my comments on Fish's essay:

But we suggest that constitutive features of constructivist anti-humanism are not innovative; that in fact they entail a repetition of some old and serious mistakes. In particular, we suggest that certain features of this movement - its prioritising of systems over individual selves, its sense of the self as infinitely malleable and

transformable, its impatience with ethical elaboration, its contempt for dissenting accounts of the world - are, at the very least, subliminally totalitarian in tendency. (9)

One has almost inevitably here to note the infamous scandal occasioned by the posthumous discovery of newspaper articles which had been written by the eminent post-structuralist critic, Paul de Man, when he was working as a journalist in Belgium during the Nazi occupation, and in which, it seemed, he effectively collaborated in the persecution of the Jews. There is no evidence that de Man ever repudiated the views expressed in these articles. Furthermore, according to Louis Menand, (1991) Derrida and others defended de Man by claiming that his use of deconstruction was evidence of his actual resistance in the offending articles to totalitarian oppression, whilst J. Hillis Miller and Geoffrey Hartman saw de Man's wartime attitudes as a youthful error which his later work on deconstruction laboured to correct. Menand's judicious account of the conflicting responses to the de Man 'scandal' by academics who wished to defend both de Man and their own post-structuralist theories lends weight to the accusation that post-structuralism is incapable of supplying adequate moral foundations upon which a critique of collaboration-under-duress with the Nazi's Final Solution might be founded. Thus if post-structuralism is not in itself totalitarian it might at least offer some scope for totalitarian practices.

Freadman and Miller devote their last chapter to outlining an alternative humanist literary theory which will support a strong ethical and political agenda capable of contributing significantly to the emancipation of the individual. Finally they illustrate the value of their theory in a 'reading for the ethical' (228) of Saul Bellow's novel *Mr Sammler's Planet*. Thus, whilst a certain generosity is apparent in Freadman and Miller's discussion of post-structuralist positions, it is also clear that they can countenance no compromise, no synthesis, with what they see as post-structuralism's radically flawed views. Yet, when viewed alongside the critiques of post-structuralism which follow, it seems that the terms of reference of their argument and the empirical evidence which it is based upon are too narrow, and that their claims for the referentiality of texts and the agency of a substantial self are therefore too strong.

Another, more moderate, defender of the referentiality of language, the possibility of communication and freedom of choice against the elements of post-structuralism which threaten them, is the British philosopher and novelist, Iris Murdoch. In her (1992) *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals*, she describes post-structuralism as 'linguistic determinism', and mounts an attack on its 'exaggerations' and 'sleight of hand'. Ranging - much more widely than do

Freadman and Miller - through discussions of Plato, Schopenhauer, Wittgenstein, Descartes, Kant, Kierkegaard, Hegel, Heidegger, Anselm, Tillich and Buber, to name only some of her references, Murdoch makes a powerful, though ultimately tentative, case for the continuing relevance to moral philosophy of the great Western metaphysical tradition and of the logical reasoning required in philosophical analysis. At the same time she demonstrates the important contributions of religion, particularly through both Eastern and Western mysticism. It is especially interesting that, in an era when Heidegger and Derrida pronounced the end of metaphysical philosophy, Murdoch returns to its roots in order to recuperate the Platonic idea of the Good, an idea which we learn from Plato is apprehended by mysticism, supported by reason, and communicated most engagingly through his command of poetic language.

Murdoch's book is no cowardly or nostalgic retreat into humanism to avoid facing up to disturbing attacks on the metaphysical foundations of the humanist tradition by the post-structuralists and the pragmatists. Murdoch considers deeply and at length the claims of Derrida, and finds them hardly new and dangerously overstated. Nor is it just in the chapter headed 'Derrida and Structuralism' that she gives evidence to support her case: right through the book she pursues an argument which depends equally on empiricism, mystical experience, reason, literature, and appeals to the writings of the great philosophers of the Western tradition. She devotes two chapters to the subject of 'Consciousness and Thought' in which she gives a detailed discussion of the philosophical concepts of the self and shows that the pursuit of the idea of the Good is worthwhile despite very real human limitations. In particular she keeps chipping away at the many arguments which have been used to deny the, admittedly limited, freedom of the self. Murdoch's book is clearly a work of great significance and one that exponents of post-structuralism should not ignore. Indeed, those who are convinced that rhetoric has triumphed over metaphysics might be impelled at least to think again if they were to read Murdoch with an open mind.

In several recent books Christopher Norris has advanced a powerful critique of some of the post-structuralist elements in postmodernism, not only in their extreme versions such as those of Lyotard, Foucault, Baudrillard, Deleuze and Guattari, and J. Hillis Miller, but also in the more genial pragmatism of Richard Rorty. In his provocatively titled book, (1993) *The Truth about Postmodernism*, Norris focuses on the political and ethical implications for contemporary society of the justification by post-structuralist theories of relativism, ethical pragmatism and consensus belief. He is especially critical of the resulting

malaise of intellectuals and their inability to engage in principled criticism of government policy in the UK and the US. In a series of extended essays he examines a variety of post-structuralist positions, showing how they have misread Kant, who, he argues, anticipated their mistakes in his own defence of 'practical reason', which provides the foundation for both Kant's ethics and the whole program of Enlightenment humanism.

Norris argues that the American literary critic, J. Hillis Miller, fails to support his case that language is non-referential when he notes 'the frequency with which Kant has recourse to fictive, allegorical, or imaginary episodes' in order to advance his argument. This is a matter which is also discussed at some length by Tobin Siebers. (1992) Norris reminds his readers that post-structuralist theories have 'grown up in isolation from other, more cogent and productive ways of thinking about the relation between sense, reference and truth'. In particular, post-structuralism, especially as applied in deconstruction, has

taken it as gospel (following Saussure) that 'the sign' is the minimal distinctive unit of language, rather than the sentence (or the proposition) conceived as a bearer of articulate meanings and truth-claims which can then be analysed in terms of their logico-semantic and referential status. By ignoring this alternative - as developed by philosophers in the broadly Fregean line of descent - post-structuralist theory has condemned itself, cheerfully enough, to an outlook of last-ditch cognitive scepticism, along with a species of thoroughgoing value-relativism whose sole guiding principle is Lyotard's strictly incoherent notion of 'judging without criteria'. For such ideas can gain credence only on condition that we give up all claims to validity or truth. (87)

Throughout his book Norris refers to Derrida in only a few brief and surprisingly favourable asides. For example, in pointing out that radical literary theorists raise language to 'a position of undisputed eminence' and refuse 'to acknowledge any argument or truth-claim that does not abide by this textualist imperative', Norris says:

No doubt one source of confusion here is a simplified reading of Derrida which latches on to some of his more sweeping pronouncements as regards the Western 'metaphysics of presence', and takes him to have shown - once and for all - that any talk of truth is inescapably complicit with that age-old logocentric regime. On the contrary, as [Derrida] puts it in a recent essay:

the value of truth (and all those values associated with it) is never contested or destroyed in my writings, but only reinscribed in more powerful, larger, more stratified contexts... And within those contexts (that is, within relations of force that are always differential - for example, socio-political-institutional - but even beyond these determinations) that are relatively stable, sometimes apparently almost unshakeable, it should be possible to invoke rules of competence, criteria of discussion and of consensus, good faith, lucidity, rigour, criticism, and pedagogy.

One could hardly wish for a plainer declaration of the gulf that separates Derrida's work from the currency of postmodern-pragmatist thought. (300, 301)

Norris concludes that postmodern theorists (excluding Derrida) have retreated from their prime task of encouraging the critical debate which is required to fight religious and other dogmatisms. (He includes here the dogmatic approach of some of Derrida's followers - the 'post-structuralist fundamentalists' whom I referred to earlier.) He notes, following Jonathan Culler, the irony that current literary theory is the product of the 'historical scholarship, textual hermeneutics, philological inquiry, comparative source-studies, sociology of belief and so forth' which undermined revealed dogmatic religion. 'Nowadays,' he says, 'this historical trend has been reversed...to a point where (for instance) deconstruction can be annexed to the discourse of negative theology,¹⁰ and where the values of enlightened or secular critique are routinely dismissed as an embarrassing throwback to that bad old regime of reason, progress and truth'. (302)

Kant, Norris maintains, was well aware of the dangers 'courted by any interest-group or creed, like the current post-modern pragmatist trend, that set out to blur the line between... disparate orders of truth claim, and which thus ended up by effectively endorsing a wholesale reduction of truth to what is presently and contingently "good in the way of belief" '. (303) What is needed today, Norris argues, is a careful re-reading of Kant's account of the relationship between epistemology, ethics and aesthetics.

A scholar who agrees with Norris that 'the minimal distinctive unit of language [is] the sentence (or the proposition) conceived as a bearer of articulate meanings and truth claims' (Norris, as quoted above) is Richard Harland. In his first book, (1991) *Superstructuralism*, Harland outlines the philosophy of structuralism and its modification by post-structuralism, while in his second book, (1993) *Beyond Superstructuralism*, he criticises this philosophy by re-examining its foundation in the linguistic theory of Saussure. In fact he makes precisely the same point as Norris, when he says that 'superstructuralism' tends to focus on the individual word as the fundamental unit of meaning rather than the sentence or proposition, or, as Harland more accurately puts it, the syntagm. Harland develops the basic elements of a syntagmatic theory of language which provides a better explanation of how language refers to the world. He then considers some of the implications of this theory for philosophy, linguistics,

¹⁰ See for example Kevin Hart's (1989) *The Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction, Theology and Philosophy*.

literature and textual interpretation. In commenting on Derrida's deconstruction of Plato's use of the word *pharmakon*, Harland says:

The first thing to notice is that Derrida... picks out only single isolated terms. The argument of Plato's text as a whole is outweighed by the 'message' of a single word. Of course, many writers seize upon some particular word in an opponent's vocabulary and try to turn it against its user. But this is essentially a debating ploy. Not so for Derrida. For Derrida, the 'message' of a single word is intrinsically more important than any syntagmatically created argument. (1993: 214)

Put like this, Harland's point seems such a commonsense one that it might be considered astonishing that Derrida's views have been so influential. However, Iris Murdoch's (1992) discussion of Derrida, in *Metaphysics as a Guide for Morals*, suggests some reasons why deconstruction has enjoyed such currency. First, it reflected, as much as it created, the spirit of its time. Second, Derrida is a brilliantly engaging thinker and writer - perhaps a master *par excellence* of rhetoric - and his coruscating wordplay generates a tantalising sense of mystification. Third, he asks searching questions of things which our tradition tends to take for granted, and answers them with what Murdoch argues are merely half truths. Fourth, post-structuralism is a kind of linguistic determinism (since in Derrida's view writing precedes and *constructs* our thinking about the world and the self) and determinism holds a perennial fascination for many people since it relieves them of moral responsibility. Last, I should point out that Harland's argument is far more complex than I have indicated here and goes well beyond any simplistic, commonsense assumptions about the way language refers to the world. Thus for many literary critics not deeply familiar with the traditions of epistemology and the philosophy of language it has not been easy to see precisely where Derrida's linguistic philosophy might have gone astray or how his theories might be countered. However, like Norris, Harland does not see Derrida as all bad and indeed has more time for Derrida than for his followers. (221)

Harland concludes his argument for what he considers to be his particularly new insights into the referentiality of language through the operation of its syntagms by saying, 'If these ideas are acceptable, then we have moved decisively *beyond Superstructuralism*'. (226) Many opponents of post-structuralism would be pleased to hear this news, but it would be premature to announce that a post-post-structuralist period had arrived. The fact that post-structuralist ideas are still exercising a powerful influence in the humanities is evidence that such a day has not yet dawned. Thus there remains the necessity of studying more closely Derrida, Foucault and others, along with the alternative theories which are on offer, including Harland's and the ones which

Norris mentioned above. After all, determinism and relativism have a way of rearing their heads in different forms throughout history - in this case as the linguistic determinism and moral relativism of some versions of post-structuralism. Clearly, if they are not absolute conditions of our existence, they at least appeal to an enduring human need: perhaps the Nietzschean desire for a Dionysian liberation from the burden of Apollonian moral responsibility. But such a liberation from Nietzsche's 'slave mentality' may in fact lead to a worse kind of slavery - as we may be learning in the postmodern dystopias of Western civilisation, where moral relativism and an extreme pluralism, which borders on complete individualism, are celebrated as the end of historical development. Here an illusion of individual freedom, along with materialistic desires and the power to satisfy them, has become a necessary ingredient in the manufacture of a global commodity market by multinational corporations - a point which forms part of Deleuze and Guattari's (1983) argument in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* concerning the moral bankruptcy of late capitalism.

Moral autonomy has still to be paid for at the high price of (among other things) serious study and principled, reasoned critique. Nevertheless, with all that, it will be necessary to teach our children, especially in literary studies, to cope with and even to enjoy some Derridean 'play'. Derrida is surely right in his claim that 'play', or *différance*, is a condition of discourse though not, I would argue, a totally disabling one. Indeed, as I maintain in discussing post-structuralist and pragmatist ethics (Chapter 2) and Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, (Chapter 3) a degree of indeterminacy in language may well be one of the conditions of possibility for moral autonomy itself. For if ethical reasoning in language could be as inexorable in its logic and in its reference to the world as mathematics seems to be, there could ultimately be no freedom of choice. As it is, in many complex situations ethics can only enlighten and guide our judgement - its analysis cannot be computed and so it cannot dictate ends and means. Thus we are frequently left to choose between reasonable alternatives, and to evaluate the wisdom of our choice in hindsight by its results.

Compared with the previous critiques, Joseph Carroll's recent book, (1995) *Evolution and Literary Theory*, launches an even less sympathetic attack on what he argues are the unjustified assumptions and flawed logic of post-structuralism, the central tenets of which he characterises as textualism and indeterminacy. Since post-structuralism has become the dominant paradigm in literary and cultural studies he does not expect that his critique will be immediately accepted. However, he argues that the paradigm which will ultimately supplant post-structuralism is not the return to metaphysical idealism

posited by Miller and Freadman, Murdoch, Norris and possibly Harland. Indeed, as my discussion of Fish's essay has revealed, post-structuralism is the *negation* of idealism and therefore inextricably dependent upon it. Hence post-structuralism sets up a false dichotomy between belief in the possibility of knowing the absolute truth and belief in a radical scepticism. Carroll reminds his readers that there is another alternative: the procedural scepticism of scientific realism and naturalism, perhaps best represented in the evolutionary epistemology of Konrad Lorenz (1978) and Karl Popper. (1979)

In subsequent chapters I will pursue the possibilities for ethics, ethical criticism and critical literacy teaching which are inherent in evolutionary epistemology. For now it will suffice to say that, according to Carroll, Popper's methodology of science allows for the imaginative proposal of hypotheses - i.e. tentative 'truths' based on observations of nature, the logical analysis of data and intuition - which are open to revision through the construction of experiments designed to test their falsifiability. In this way science is able, in theory, to proceed in an orderly manner towards the construction and reconstruction of theories which provide more and more accurate representations of nature, representations that include ever more precise details hierarchically organised within an ever-expanding framework. In other words, science aims at a totalised system of knowledge but is insured against the danger of authoritarianism, inherent in such systems, by its in-built procedural scepticism. In practice of course - as sociologists of science, beginning with Thomas Kuhn, (1962) have pointed out - various kinds of human error interfere with this process, but there are checks and balances operating within the international community of scientists which work to obviate these problems in the long term. Fundamental to the practice of science is the recognition that its hypotheses must pass the twin tests of logical coherence and empirical evidence. Science's products must not only seem plausible but they must also work - and of course they frequently do, dramatically and sometimes terrifyingly. There is an assumption here that the reality which science purports to describe - particularly when it does so in mathematical terms - is itself logically coherent, but this too is merely a hypothesis which must stand up to the test of empirical evidence. So far the evidence that mathematics accurately refers to the world has been overwhelming, as can be seen for example by the necessity of incorporating Einstein's theory of general relativity in designing the algorithms employed in satellite global positioning technology.

In contrast to this view of science as a form of knowledge on which we constantly stake our lives, Carroll points out that only an insane person would act, outside the theoretical realm of critical discourse, on the view attributed to

oversimplified post-structuralist theory that all language is indeterminate and that there is nothing beyond text. The professor of cultural studies, animatedly explaining these doctrines to his colleagues while crossing a busy street, would almost certainly jump out of the way of an oncoming vehicle when a colleague cries, 'Look out for the bus!' Furthermore (as Abrams pointed out in 'The Deconstructive Angel', mentioned above), the professor would only have bothered to explain his ideas to his colleagues if he had some confidence that they could gain from his discourse a reasonably accurate understanding of what he meant. This type of argument may strike some post-structuralists as a cheap shot. However, Carroll goes to great lengths to illustrate what he claims are the extremity and illogicality of some of the assertions of Derrida, Foucault and other post-structuralists of every conceivable stripe. His section entitled the 'Truistic/Radical Shuffle' (56-68) is a particularly detailed and revealing analysis of the varieties of fallacious argument used by many of the most respected proponents of post-structuralist literary theories.

The main purpose of Carroll's book is to offer what he maintains is a more accurate theory of literature and criticism situated within the wider framework of evolutionary biology, which in turn is situated within the ascending hierarchy of scientific constructs consisting of genetics, molecular biology, chemistry and physics. It is this new paradigm - a carefully contrived literary theory based on the idea of natural selection - which allows Carroll to criticise post-structuralism most effectively. Recent applications of evolutionary biology have begun to revolutionise such subjects as neurology, psychology, psychiatry, epistemology and ethics, and they have profound, though as yet little explored, implications for anthropology and sociology. The first part of Carroll's book, entitled 'A Darwinian Critical Paradigm', extends this revolution to literary theory in ways which seem highly plausible, and in a later section he discusses some of Darwin's and the more recent sociobiologists' explanations of the development of altruism among human beings.

Carroll's *Evolution and Literary Theory* is, to my knowledge, the first major attempt to develop a literary theory founded on evolutionary principles. Basic to his thesis is Darwin's simple but powerfully explanatory hypothesis that organisms have been adapted to their changing environments by the processes of natural selection. Hence it is reasonable to hypothesise that the highly elaborated forms of language, including literature, which characterise human organisms, are adaptive mechanisms through which humans have ultimately gained reproductive success in their physical and social circumstances. If language did not refer in an adequately determinate manner to realities beyond itself then it could not have conferred this advantage. Of course, the generally

adaptive nature of language does not preclude the development of cultural constructs which do not accurately reflect reality, but they cannot last if they are so inaccurate that they endanger individual human survival. The great success of the introduction of the scientific method is that it has institutionalised a procedure for correcting some of these misconceptions, and so has revolutionised societies which have embraced it.

The ambivalent results of the ensuing exponential advance of technology in those societies are, of course, clear to many people, especially those who care about social, ecological and aesthetic values. The fact that these extremely powerful technologies, which science has made possible, often threaten such values has perhaps blinded literary-minded people to a more fundamental fact: that science - as I will show later in discussing recent findings concerning the workings of the brain - offers the most reliable development to date of the common sense which has proved, in evolutionary terms, such a successful adaptation of human organisms to their physical and social environments. Science certainly takes us well beyond the scope of common sense, sometimes even contradicting its findings, yet the *operations* of science remain consistent with it.¹¹ Thus one might reasonably expect that at least some of the traditional or commonsense wisdom about the function of literary texts could prove to have enduring value. Furthermore, scientists like Stuart Kauffman (1995) are now learning to combine the reductivist process of identifying the patterns and laws which underlie varying levels of complexity in nature, with an understanding of how simple initial conditions and principles, combined with natural selection, can generate more and more stunningly intricate forms all the way up to the human brain - and perhaps even to human culture. Kauffman suggests for example how these ideas might be applied in determining laws of economics. Thus, when Carroll argues that literature can, in principle, be studied *scientifically* as a product of the adaptation of human organisms to their social and non-social environment, his claim could be seen to rest upon even firmer foundations than he has been able to incorporate in his book.

Science, while espousing a procedural commitment to a thoroughgoing materialism, is nevertheless grounded on the assumption that the physical processes of nature are governed by a coherent set of principles which are accessible to human thought. This accessibility - particularly evident in the extensive correspondence between mathematics and the structure of the universe which I have mentioned already and which has been noted by Paul Davies

¹¹ I am aware of how naive these observations might appear to those who argue that common sense, and indeed science itself, is entirely a construct of discourse and therefore bears no relationship to an external reality. However, as I explain more fully in Chapter 3, I consider that to be an extreme view which ignores the evidence of evolutionary biology and neuro-science.

(1992) - is a remarkable, though perhaps not ultimately surprising, notion. After all, our brains are the product of the natural order of random mutation, survival of the fittest and emergent complexity, and therefore one might reasonably suppose that our thought processes would be consistent at some level with the fundamental processes of the universe. The consideration of these principles takes us into the domain of metaphysics, and to the positing of the existence of a *Logos* in the form of the scientific laws which are in one sense immanent in, and in another sense transcendent of, nature, since these laws govern the evolution of the universe from the simple conditions which prevailed immediately following the Big Bang to the astonishing complexity which we now observe around and within us, especially in the form of our own brains.¹²

However, despite science's logocentric implications and totalising ambitions, evolutionary epistemology does not suggest that we have direct access to the absolute truth about these laws - unless, as Roger Penrose (1995) suggests, it is in the form of partial insights gained by means of intuitions, which nevertheless must be checked by rational and empirical processes. We must be content with theories which are approximations to truth, and a process which promises greater accuracy in our understanding of the complexities of the universe and the generalisations which describe the relationships between them. It is a process which cannot prevent us from falling from time to time into a variety of short- or long-lived misconceptions, but which offers a method of correcting these eventually. With this in mind, it may prove possible for a theorist who is more sympathetic to post-structuralism than is Carroll to systematically incorporate some post-structuralist ideas about the problematic nature of textuality and human understanding into an evolutionary epistemology. In the next section I salvage one of these ideas - deconstruction - for later inclusion in this expanded epistemology. However the fulfilment of that task is beyond the scope of this project: in my exploration in Chapter 2 of a possible direction for ethics after post-structuralism, I pursue particular ideas about evolution, poststructuralism and metaphysics in the hope of merely opening up some avenues for their synthesis.

¹² It probably makes no more sense to ask where these laws come from than it does to ask what preceded the Big Bang, since it is part of that particular theory of origins that time as well as space was created in the quantum singularity which expanded into the universe as we know it today.

5. Ethical deconstruction: oxymoron or imperative?

The reader will recall the irony of my 'deconstruction' of the essay by Stanley Fish in order to demonstrate the ills of deconstruction, particularly its tendency to consume its supposed opposites. Of course, I too am using the term 'deconstruction' in a simplified manner, since I do not pretend to have achieved the complexity of textual analysis which Derrida demonstrates in his work. Nevertheless, I have argued that Fish is not completely in control of his utterances and that the implications of what he has said undercut what he seems to have intended. But, as the critics discussed above have noted, there is nothing new in this contention: language is a notoriously slippery medium and it would be arrogant - indeed, unethical - to pretend that everything we say or write exactly expresses our meaning, let alone the absolute truth. It is indeed a characteristic of texts to be somewhat indeterminate, but it does not follow that therefore all our utterances refer only to themselves. Language is capable of conveying at least some knowledge of truths beyond itself. We are not completely trapped in the prison-house of language, nor are we totally constructed by it. Our knowledge of external reality is no doubt severely limited, and we may indeed be largely constructed by language and other forms of discourse, but we can, by seeking the truth in conversation with all human kind, using logical and empirical procedures, draw nearer to a grasp of realities which exist independently of our reconstructions of them. If deconstruction is taken to entail that all conflicting truth claims are completely undecidable, then I judge its use of deconstruction to be erroneous and therefore unethical. But if deconstruction merely exposes a characteristic of language which renders it less than completely reliable, then I judge its use to be ethical, for here we are expressing a fact about the nature of a human phenomenon.

Is ethical deconstruction therefore an oxymoron? Clearly I do not think so. Rather it is a moral imperative - as indeed is the development of an ethics of literary criticism in general and of the teaching of critical literacy. If we seek truth, then we are obliged, among other things, to deconstruct texts in order to expose their gaps and silences, and thereby their pretensions to a degree of reference to truth which is unjustified. Deconstruction may be seen as the *destruction* of all meaning, purpose and power beyond that which we define for ourselves and our own aggrandisement. But, as I understand it, our awareness of deconstruction demonstrates that, in spite of all the ways in which language and culture have constructed and enslaved us, we still possess some freedom to deconstruct and *reconstruct* ourselves and our culture little by little. The effort needed to do so may be very great, but the questions must be faced: what will

we choose; how shall we live? These are questions of ultimate value, and only by joining in the age-old conversation of mankind concerning religions, ideologies and ethics can we hope to construct for our age a more comprehensive and achievable vision of what we should aim for. I will pursue this topic in greater depth in the course of this study, but for the moment I offer a final word from Jacques Derrida himself on the subject of the ambivalent value of deconstruction:

I would say that deconstruction is affirmation rather than questioning, in a sense which is not positive: I would distinguish between the positive, or positions, and affirmations. I think that deconstruction is affirmative rather than questioning; this affirmation goes through some radical questioning, but is not questioning in the final analysis. (Salusinszky, 1987: 20)

6. A new theory of ethics?

If indeed a morally responsible approach to the application of post-structuralism in literary criticism and English teaching is to be implemented, one which questions its assumptions and exaggerations, where can we turn to find a basis for the criteria by which we are to make our judgements? Since I have been allowing some validity to less extreme versions of post-structuralism - especially to their distinctive characteristic of deconstruction - it is clear that any *post-post-structuralist* theory of ethics must acknowledge its own inherent reflexivity and instability - its own propensity to self-destruct. In this sense it will need to be a postmodern ethics, whatever else it may incorporate. But where could one look to establish the foundations for such an ethics? From what I have suggested so far, these foundations must be tentative, but they should offer at least the possibility of leading us to a better grasp of the realities of our physical, social and psychological circumstances, realities which will significantly shape any worthwhile ethics.

Of course, there are many ethical theories on offer. How can we choose between them? Is it possible to synthesise some of them into a new theory? Or must we be content to live in a world of ethical as well as cultural pluralism, as Wayne Booth (1988) suggests in his profoundly urbane work, *The Company we Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*? Even if it proves possible to construct a more truthful and effective ethics for our age, it may be a long time (if ever) before it gains wide acceptance, and so in the meantime we will be obliged to cope in a milieu of pluralism. But why should that trouble us? Many people prefer it that way, since pluralism seems to offer a great deal of personal choice and an exciting diversity in our social relationships. However, there are always serious conflicts of interest even in the most homogeneous communities, and hence they are likely to be more prevalent in pluralist societies, in spite of the pretensions of such societies to the virtue of tolerance. What pluralism often lacks is sufficient agreement about basic moral values by which clashes of interest can be resolved. Tolerance, it might be said, is the saving virtue of pluralism, yet it is obvious that not all differences can be tolerated.¹³

Post-structuralism, with its tendency to encourage extreme relativism through the dissemination of multiple interpretations, is the philosophy *par excellence* of pluralism. Indeed, it has been suggested that post-structuralism, in spite of the fact that it has some of its roots in Marxism, is actually complicit with the interests of the power brokers of late capitalism in fostering the

¹³ Consider, for example, the case of Australian citizens who wish to practise circumcision of their daughters according to the traditions of their ethnic heritage. This custom has been specifically (and justly, I believe) proscribed by Australian law.

fragmentation of society into a multiplicity of niche markets. (Jameson, 1991; Gee, 1993) But while post-structuralism seems to offer a foundation in the nature of language for the values of individual freedom and toleration of differences, it can promise no guidance at all when individual interests intolerably conflict, as they inevitably do.

It may be, of course, that such guidance is too much to hope for, but I am not yet convinced that we should give up looking for ethical theories which reflect more accurately our changing circumstances and understandings. Indeed, it would be irresponsible to abandon the prospect of making real progress in ethics. What follows, then, is an examination of a few of the possibilities for ethics today, and a modest attempt to assemble from among them at least some of the essential ingredients of a new theory. Of course I am well aware that, after post-structuralism, any plan to construct a theory smacks of the totalising pretensions which are the target of deconstruction. However, in welcoming the healthy scepticism which post-structuralism facilitates, it is not necessary to accept that it entails the impossibility of constructing more accurate, though still partial, models of reality.

In my reading of contemporary ethics and literary theory I have identified at least three general approaches which have so far been applied to the construction of a new theory of ethics. The first is to carry on with ethics as if post-structuralism either did not exist or was patently beneath contempt. To many enthusiasts for radical literary theory this approach will seem hopelessly naive, yet useful work is being produced by philosophers who pay little or no attention to post-structuralism: for example James Rachels' (1992) fascinating book on Darwinian ethics, Peter Singer's (1975) influential work on animal liberation, and the revival of Aristotle's virtues ethics (e.g. Geach, 1977 and Nussbaum, 1988). Each of these has the capacity, at least in part, to provide workable foundations for ethical literary criticism and critical social literacy.

The second approach is to criticise and largely reject post-structuralism as fundamentally anti-ethical, a wrong turning in ethical inquiry. In this view the way forward would be to return to the metaphysical tradition and, picking up where Kant and others left off, pursue once more the rationalist, Enlightenment program. The work of Freadman, Miller and Norris illustrate this position - though, as we have seen, Freadman and Miller partially exempt Foucault from their critique, and Norris partially exempts Derrida.

The third approach, rejecting the second approach's criticism of post-structuralism as totally anti-ethical, and seeing this critique as a reactionary and simplistic misreading of theorists like Derrida and Foucault, sets out to articulate a thoroughly post-structuralist ethics. Don Cupitt (1987) in his book,

The Long-Legged Fly: a theology of language and desire, gives a sample of what such an ethics might look like.¹⁴ Of course, if a post-structuralist ethics proves satisfactory in the long run, then it would undercut the above critiques of post-structuralism as an inadequate foundation for critical social literacy. So be it: I would genuinely welcome that possibility.

However, my proposal, outlined in the next chapter, is a more conciliatory one: I want to suggest that a productive synthesis of elements of these three approaches is possible. Yet my ultimate concern lies deeper. There are signs that - contrary to the open-minded, questioning and destabilising spirit of Derrida and Foucault - post-structuralism has already been accepted as the new orthodoxy, the latest dogma, the politically correct position for the upwardly mobile literary critic or English teacher to adopt. This totalising of what, in my view, remains an incoherent field of inquiry might appear to some to provide the grounds for a reassuring moral code, a prescription for how the modern critic and teacher should think and act. But there is always the danger that the moral code of the dominant group (in this case vocal post-structuralists) will be enforced in a totalitarian manner. On the other hand, ethics as I have defined it, because it goes on asking the question, 'How should we live?' in ever changing circumstances, is the implacable enemy of totalitarian regimes. This is one reason why I am advocating that English critics and teachers, who believe in the (albeit limited) freedom of the self and the (albeit problematic) reference of texts to reality, should attend once more to the on-going conversation about ethics, relating it fruitfully to their conversations about literature and literacy.

¹⁴ See also Barker, 1994, and Caputo, 1989.

Chapter 2

Possibilities: the attraction of evolutionary ethics

1. Evolutionary epistemology: foundation for a new synthesis

The advent of post-structuralist theories has so unsettled popular assumptions concerning the philosophy of language, epistemology and metaphysics that it has made literary critics and English teachers aware that a deeper understanding of their subject obliges them to engage with these fields of inquiry. Furthermore, I am suggesting that this may also involve questions to do with the philosophy of mind, and the philosophical implications of mathematics, quantum physics, evolutionary theory, neurology, the new science of self-organising systems and, of course, ethics. In seeking foundations for ethical literary criticism and literacy teaching, it makes sense to begin by looking for some more solid ground in epistemology which underpins all of the other branches of philosophy and science mentioned here. With this in mind, an appropriate means of schematising, and perhaps synthesising, the current possibilities for ethics which seem to me most fruitful has been offered by Francis Heylighen (1993) in a brief overview of the development of epistemology in the Western tradition.¹⁵

Heylighen suggests that, amidst a confusing array of conflicting views, the history of epistemology reveals a clear trend 'from a static, passive view of knowledge towards a more and more adaptive and active one.' Ignoring the sophists' version of pragmatic epistemology, he begins with Plato's view that knowledge is the awareness of absolute, universal Ideas or Forms existing independently of any subject trying to apprehend them. Aristotle, while emphasising the need for logical and empirical methods of knowledge-gathering, still accepted the belief that such knowledge was an apprehension of necessary and universal principles. After the Renaissance two main epistemological views dominated philosophy: empiricism, which holds that knowledge is produced by sensory perception; and rationalism, which sees it as the result of rational reflection. Through its application in the experimental sciences, empiricism has led to the still commonly held 'reflection-

¹⁵ Support for Heylighen's linking of epistemology and ethics within an evolutionary framework may be found in Michael Bradie, (1992) *The Secret Chain: Evolution and Ethics*. Bradie undertakes a cautious historical and philosophical analysis of the relevance of evolutionary considerations to the development of human moral systems.

correspondence theory' of knowledge. In this view knowledge has no *a priori* existence but has to be developed by observation, resulting in a kind of mapping or reflection in our minds of external objects through our sensory perceptions. This knowledge is considered to be absolute in that it truly corresponds to a part of external reality, even though it may leave out many details and may never achieve completeness. Kant developed an important synthesis of empiricism and rationalism in which knowledge results from the organisation of perceptual data on the basis of innate cognitive 'categories', including space, time, objects and causality. These categories are absolute in that they are static and given, yet they afford only subjective knowledge and deny a purely objective representation of things-in-themselves.

According to Heylighen the next stage in the development of epistemology is pragmatism, which he identifies in part with logical positivism and conventionalism. Here knowledge consists of models which attempt to represent the environment in order to give the simplest solutions to whatever problems are selected. No model can capture all the details of an aspect of reality or represent all aspects of reality, and so we must accept the parallel existence of different, even contradictory, models. Questions concerning the ultimate reality behind the model are meaningless. Models are built from parts of other models and empirical data on the basis of trial and error and intuition. A more radical epistemology is to be found in constructivism which assumes that all knowledge is built up from scratch by the knower. In this view, which is similar to post-structuralist ideas, there are no 'givens' of empirical data, innate categories or cognitive structures, and there is no notion of correspondence to external reality. Heylighen comments that, because of this lack of connection between models and the things they seem to represent, constructivism may lead to an extreme relativism in which any model constructed by the subject is considered to be as good as any other, and there is no way to distinguish between adequate or 'true' knowledge and inadequate or 'false' knowledge. However, he maintains that there are two approaches which try to avoid the dangers of such an 'absolute relativism'. Individual constructivism assumes that the individual attempts to achieve coherence among different pieces of knowledge by tending to reject constructions which are inconsistent with the bulk of other knowledge, and by maintaining constructions which succeed in integrating previously incoherent notions. Social constructivism sees consensus between different subjects as the ultimate criterion to judge knowledge as 'true' or 'real'. In the more radical forms of constructivism knowledge is held to be more or less independent of 'external reality' since the nervous system is incapable of distinguishing between a perception caused by an external

phenomenon and a hallucination caused by a purely internal event. Thus the basic criterion of knowledge is that different mental entities or processes within or between subjects should reach some kind of equilibrium based on social consensus or internal coherence, an equilibrium which is therefore always changing. The recent development of various forms of evolutionary epistemology - notably in the work of Karl Popper (1979) and Donald Campbell (1974) - offers a broader or synthetic view, Heylighen believes. Here knowledge is assumed to be constructed by the subject or group of subjects in order to adapt to their environment at different levels: biological, psychological and social. Construction occurs through more or less blind variation of existing pieces of knowledge and the selection of new combinations which contribute most to the survival and reproduction of the subject(s) within their particular environment. In this way, although no objective correspondence is assumed, the external world again enters the picture through an equilibrium between the products of internal variation and different internal or external selection criteria. Absolutism or permanence has disappeared, but knowledge remains a passive instrument of survival developed in organisms through the processes of natural selection. Nevertheless, a degree of referentiality is restored to knowledge through evolutionary epistemology.

An even more recent, and perhaps more radical approach extends this evolutionary view to make knowledge actively pursue goals of its own. This view, known as 'memetics', was first suggested by Richard Dawkins (1976) in his book, *The Selfish Gene*. Just as genes can be seen as encoded pieces of information replicating themselves by means of the bodies which they inform, and adapting to changing environments, so pieces of knowledge, or 'memes', can be seen as being transmitted from one individual or group to another, often outliving those organisms, and ultimately adapting to the environment by their own evolutionary processes of random mutation and the natural selection of those memes which provide the greatest survival value. However, it is possible for a meme to proliferate in the short term (in evolutionary time scales this may sometimes mean thousands of years) even though the knowledge it induces in any individual carrier may be wholly inadequate and even dangerous to survival. This is possible as long as the meme is sufficiently 'convincing' to new carriers who live long enough to pass it on.

In this epistemology even the subject of the knowledge has lost its primacy and knowledge has become a force of its own, as is perhaps evidenced by the rapid proliferation of superstitions, fads, and irrational beliefs which have spread around the globe. Memetics, like social constructivism, attends to communication and social processes in the development of knowledge, but

instead of seeing knowledge as constructed by the social system (i.e. by language and other discourses), it sees social systems as constructed by knowledge processes. A social system, Heylighen says, can be defined by the fact that its members share the same meme. Even the modern concept of the self could be considered a result of memetic evolution. For example Charles Taylor (1989) has argued in *The Sources of the Self* that our modern notion of the self, originally formed by the Judaeo-Christian religious traditions, has been re-shaped by the powerful and often oppositionary traditions of the Enlightenment and Romanticism.

Further to Heylighen's description, I should point out that, while memetics has gained considerable attention in recent years, it remains a highly problematic concept. The relationship between memes and genes is still only that of an analogy - though perhaps it will prove a fruitful one as analogies have so often done in the past by suggesting questions and hypotheses for further investigation.¹⁶ Meanwhile there is no such clear understanding of the adaptation and selection of memes, as there is of genes whose behaviour is fairly well understood in terms of their chemistry and physics. The fact that Heylighen exercises sufficient agency to judge some memes as irrational beliefs suggests that he believes that human individuals are not entirely at their mercy, or at least that the conflict between different memes provides us with positions from which to stage critiques and create new syntheses. Indeed, Heylighen's practice in general makes it clear that a sufficiently well educated human can consciously attempt to produce memes which he judges to be broadly adaptive. Moreover, this ability might be expected among organisms which have evolved to a level of consciousness that allows them to understand and therefore manipulate some of the processes of their own further evolution. Thus, while I accept that many ideas do proliferate largely beyond the control of those who seek to manipulate them, I remain much happier with Popper's account of evolutionary epistemology, particularly as it leaves more room for the agency of the subject in developing a knowledge which might approximate to external reality.

Heylighen presents his summary of the history of epistemology as a process of development in our understanding from philosophical idealism, through naive realism, to a somewhat sceptical evolutionary constructivism. He admits that we are now faced with a strong temptation to lapse into a purely anarchistic or relativist attitude in which it seems impossible to formulate any reliable, general criteria for distinguishing 'good' and 'bad' knowledge. However,

¹⁶ A further discussion of the importance of analogies in science appears in my study of A.S. Byatt's *Morpho Eugenia* in Chapter 3.

he also suggests that in practice 'intuition' (however this presumably adaptive subconscious process may operate) usually helps us to distinguish perceptions from hallucinations, and unreliable predictions from reliable ones. Furthermore, the systematic insights of evolutionary theory assume a notion of natural selection which can be understood to some extent. And, while no one criterion seems adequate to found a theory of knowledge, we can identify multiple and sometimes contradictory selection criteria, such as correspondence, coherence, consensus, predictability, falsifiability and survivability, which could perhaps be built into a simple, generalised conceptual framework, thus providing an epistemology which supersedes all of the theories which Heylighen has outlined.

Heylighen's account is of course over-simplified - for example he ignores the presence of constructivist views from the sophists of ancient Greece onwards which Fish demonstrates in his account of the persistence of rhetoric - yet it is probable that our understanding of different epistemological positions has advanced to the point where it may now be possible to formulate a new theory. Indeed, Heylighen is committed to testing his scientifically reductive hypothesis about evolutionary epistemology as one of the editors (the others are C. Joslyn and V. Turchin) of a fascinating experiment, known as the *Principia Cybernetica Project*, which was started in 1989 and is still being conducted at a site bearing that name on the World-Wide Web. Here they are gathering a network of incomplete texts on such fundamental questions of philosophy as: *Who am I? Where do I come from? Where am I going to? What is knowledge? What is truth? What are good and evil? What is the meaning of life?* The new element in this project is the belief that in our 'information age' systems science, or cybernetics, can provide the basis for contemporary philosophy. The founders of the project start from the thesis that systems at all levels have been constructed by evolution, which they define as 'a continuing process of self-organisation, based on variation and natural selection of the "fittest" configuration. Evolution continuously creates complexity and makes systems more adaptive by giving them better control over their environments.' (Heylighen, 1994)

As this quotation suggests, Heylighen, Joslyn and Turchin, and their various contributors, draw upon the latest developments in evolutionary theory, especially the application of the mathematical theory of complex self-organising systems in computer modelling of evolutionary and ontogenetic processes, which the biologist Stuart Kauffman (1995) explains in his book, *At Home in the Universe: The Search for Laws of Self-Organization and Complexity*. Kauffman is careful to warn his readers that his proposals, made on the basis of

his team's extensive work at the Santa Fe Institute, are still only hypothetical, but they have reached the stage where he can offer them seriously. If, he says with justifiable excitement, he turns out to be right, then the fundamental structure of our universe gives rise to an 'order for free' in open-ended thermodynamic systems, driven paradoxically by the law of increasing entropy. (A familiar example of such spontaneous order occurring in a system which is 'running down' is the vortex produced in the bath water over the drain hole when the plug is removed.) Hence the amazing complexity of human beings may not be the result of some fantastic accident in defiance of the most overwhelming odds, but instead only to be expected in such a finely tuned universe. Among other things, the editors of the *Principia Cybernetica Project* adopt from complexity theory the concept of 'phase transition'. They see this as the emergence of a new level of control, which they call a 'metasystem transition', regarding it as the quantum of evolution. In fact they call their philosophy 'Metasystem Transition Theory', which includes 'a metaphysics, based on processes or actions as ontological primitives; an epistemology, which understands knowledge as constructed by the subject or group, but undergoing selection by the environment; and an ethics, with survival and the continuance of the process of evolution as supreme values'. (Heylighen 1995) At this stage their evolutionary ethics appears to be fairly rudimentary, but it has raised questions about such disturbing topics as the removal of moral responsibility from individuals interacting with virtual realities, (Cranford 1996) the construction of different selves in cyberspace, (Dowling 1996) and the possible evolution of humans as 'super- or meta-beings' who would become cybernetically immortal, perhaps by surviving in a silicon-based electronic network. (Heylighen, 1996)

Such a post-biological future for our species has been proposed as a direct, if rather distant, outcome of the nub of the *Principia Cybernetica* experiment, which involves the use of computer technology to

develop a large philosophical text from many internet nodes which are linked together with different relationships. Readers can navigate among the many concepts, guided by their individual understanding and interests. Disparate material can be integrated together while being written and read by collaborators from all around the world, undergoing variation and selection. Thus we apply theories about the evolution of cybernetic systems to the practical development of this very system of philosophy.' (Heylighen, 1993)

In this way the editors are also attempting to solve the complex problem of re-integrating the explosion and fragmentation of knowledge which is taking place in our time. In particular they are linking the sciences of complexity, artificial intelligence, artificial life, cognitive psychology, evolutionary systems and

memetics. However, the application of the concept of natural selection to this process of knowledge development is somewhat problematic, since clearly there are many conscious, intentional operations occurring in generating, selecting, rejecting, shaping and linking ideas. Thus it might be more accurate to see the process as a combination of natural and artificial selection.

The *Principia Cybernetica Project* offers a useful and particularly appropriate means of synthesising ethical as well as epistemological theories. Its proposed method of developing knowledge through an evolutionary process of natural (and, as I maintain, artificial) selection seems to fit with my own experience of gathering, generating, selecting, rejecting, and synthesising ideas in this study - mental operations which occur both unconsciously, or naturally, and consciously, or artificially. Moreover, the *Principia Cybernetica Project's* key thesis, that the processes of biological and cultural evolution are fundamental to the development of metaphysics, epistemology and ethics, had in my own work moved from just one of a number of competing theories to the dominant place *before* I encountered Joseph Carroll's book, *Evolution and Literary Theory*, and the *Principia Cybernetica Project*. This process can be observed in the five papers which I have produced in the course of this study, and in which I have explored a variety of ethical theories and approaches to ethical criticism. (Pride 1992, 1993, 1994a, 1994b, 1995) My allegiance to particular positions has been driven by a desire to accommodate the best of both Platonic idealism and post-structuralist scepticism. In doing so I have considered James Rachels' and Peter Singer's evolutionary ethics (an example of Heylighen's epistemological evolutionism); C. S. Lewis's deontological ethics (absolutism); Freadman and Miller's humanist ethics (empiricism and rationalism); Norris's Kantianism; the ethical pragmatism of Richard Rorty and others as described in the work of David Parker; the pragmatist and, later, absolutist ethics of Jurgen Habermas; the post-structuralist ethics of Geoffrey Harpham (constructivism); the ethical pluralism of Tobin Siebers; and the postmodern ethics of Zygmunt Baumann who draws heavily on the phenomenological ethics of Emmanuel Lévinas. My main purpose in these papers was to suggest various avenues for research, any of which could be used to reinstate ethics at the heart of literary criticism and teaching. But I also hoped that eventually a new synthesis in ethics might emerge, one which would be more valid, though inevitably far from perfect, and which would more effectively support this project.

Since encountering James Rachels' (1990) book, *Created from Animals: the Moral Implications Of Darwinism*, at the beginning of my study, it seems that philosophical naturalism - entailed by the concepts of physical,

psychological and social evolution through mutation, self-organisation and natural selection - has begun to act (in the language of complexity theory) as a major 'attractor' in my thinking. Around it other key concepts or 'attractors' (such as, in Heylighen's terms, absolutism, empiricism, rationalism, pragmatism, constructivism, relativism and evolutionism) are beginning to fall into a complex pattern within the conceptual space which I have been exploring. I cannot pretend that I have been able to review the whole history of ethics, or even all of the theories which moral philosophers are debating today (such as virtues ethics, feminist ethics and John Rawls', 1971, theory of justice) in order to position each of them within this scheme - nor am I at all certain it would yet be possible anyway. However, I think it highly likely that evolutionary theory will enable a more powerful synthesis in the domain of ethics, as it already is in the neurological and cognitive sciences. Rachels' book, mentioned above, is a striking example of the potential of evolution to provide new insights in ethics; Michael Gazzaniga's (1994) work, *Nature's Mind: The Biological Roots of Thinking, Emotions, Sexuality, Language and Intelligence* is an example of the application of evolutionary ideas in understanding the workings of the brain; and Robert Wright's (1995) illustration of the new science of evolutionary psychology through a biography of Charles Darwin, *The Moral Animal: Evolutionary Psychology and Everyday Life*, is an example of how evolutionary theory is revolutionising both psychology and ethics.

In the remaining sections of this chapter I discuss a series of texts in order to identify some elements of a possible synthesis of post-structuralist, pragmatist, postmodern, and metaphysical ethics with evolutionary ethics. I begin with evolutionary ethics in order to extend the framework established in the present section (and in my discussion of Joseph Carroll's, 1995, work in Chapter 2.4) and to make it clear how the theory of evolution provides a deeper explanation for the most useful insights of what I see as the post-structuralist-pragmatist-postmodern coalition. I am using the term 'deeper' here in the sense provided by the hierarchical structure of science: thus sociobiological phenomena can be explained in terms of natural selection theory which can be explained in terms of genetic mutation, then molecular biology, chemistry, and ultimately atomic, particle and quantum physics. In view of the fact that I am proposing such scientific-materialist foundations for morality and hence for ethics it may seem surprising that I am also suggesting that metaphysics could be re-instated in this context. However, anyone familiar with discussions of quantum physics will be aware that at this level of research mathematical physicists are broaching fundamental - i.e. metaphysical - questions about the nature of existence. From the remainder of this chapter, then, I hope that there

will emerge the rudiments of an evolutionary-postmodern-metaphysical synthesis which Zohar and Marshall (1993) call 'quantum ethics', and which I am calling, after Zygmunt Bauman (1993), an ethics of 'disillusionment and re-enchantment'.

2. Evolutionary Ethics: the limits of biology

Continuing modernity's rationalist-empiricist project, while eschewing the crude social Darwinism of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and ignoring the post-structuralists' questioning of referentiality and agency, the moral philosopher James Rachels (1990) has developed an argument for an evolutionary ethics in his book, *Created from Animals: the Moral Implications of Darwinism*. He maintains that humans have evolved as social animals among whom a modicum of altruism is necessary for survival. Central to his argument is the notion that self-consciousness and the degree of free will (or agency) it confers on us are also essential to our success as a species. Care for others is something we not only *can* choose but also *should* if we wish our species to survive. Furthermore, Rachels argues that our survival is interdependent with the survival of the widest possible variety of other species within the earth's ecosystem, and for our own sake we should care for them. This is a consequentialist (or utilitarian) theory of ethics, though its results are not only measured in terms of mere survival: we also have a duty to protect the quality of life of members of our own and other species by not causing them unnecessary pain. Rachels arrives at this view by arguing that as self-conscious beings the quality of our lives is of value to us; therefore it is reasonable to suppose that the quality of others' lives must also be valuable to them in proportion to their degree of self-consciousness; and consequently we should not do to them what we would not want them to do to us. Thus, just as we condemn racism on such grounds, we should also condemn what he calls 'speciesism'.¹⁷ We should instead pursue a form of moral individualism which extends to individual members of all species, treating like cases alike and distinguishing between individuals only on the grounds of relevant differences.

Rachels claims that his theory avoids committing the naturalistic fallacy - the logical mistake of deriving 'ought' from 'is' - by arguing that, while 'is' cannot logically entail 'ought', nevertheless the one can lend support to the other. For example the (supposed) fact that pigs possess enough self-consciousness to suffer from fear of their impending death in a slaughterhouse does not necessarily mean that we ought not to slaughter them, but it does offer a significant reason for reconsidering our treatment of pigs. At least it might mean that we ought not to slaughter them in a way that provokes terror. Hence, while no complete justification might be found for a particular moral act, it could be strongly indicated by an array of sufficiently weighty reasons derived

¹⁷ A term invented by the psychologist Richard Ryde and popularised by Peter Singer's (1975) book *Animal Liberation*.

from our understanding of the facts of the case within a prevailing world view. Rachels argues that the movement in the modern period from a creationist world view, based on religious belief, to an evolutionary one, based on scientific understanding, supports a radical reappraisal of the old belief in the dignity of man. It is no longer reasonable to assume that man occupies the pre-eminent place in the cosmos and that all other creatures exist to serve him. Instead there is a widespread recognition in Western society that humans are merely animals, that we might not possess an eternal soul, and that we differ from other animals in degree rather than in kind. For while it is true that humans have developed vastly more complex languages (and presumably a greater degree of self-consciousness) than our nearest relatives among the primates, we also know that we share 98.4% of our DNA with them. (Diamond 1991: 2) These ideas have led Rachels to call his ethical theory 'morality without hubris'. (1993: 180)

Rachels' view that an evolutionary ethics can be founded partly on the notion that humans have evolved as social animals, whose survival depends both on a degree of altruistic cooperation, including particular care for their young and for their siblings, and partly on their reasoning powers, is supported to some extent by the relatively new field of sociobiology,¹⁸ established by Edward O. Wilson, (1980) and developed largely by Robert Trivers, (1985) J. Maynard Smith (1982) and Richard Dawkins. (1982, 1986) Here one scientific approach which has been very successful is Maynard Smith's application of the mathematics of game theory, through computer modelling, to explain such phenomena as the evolution of altruism, especially between siblings, in animal populations. However, Rachels expresses some scepticism about the way sociobiology has been applied to ethics:

One problem is that, while sociobiological results may be important for moral deliberation, they are important in a way that is different from what Wilson and his followers suggest. Suppose it *were* true that male dominance is an unavoidable consequence of human nature. It would not follow that the feminist analysis of its evils is false. Feminists might still be right that women's lives are impoverished when they are consigned to an inferior social status. What would follow, perhaps, is that male dominance is ineradicable. But that would be only like discovering that a dread disease is forever incurable. We might have to live with that knowledge, but we surely would not be forced to think it a good thing. Nor would we have to cease our efforts to ameliorate the suffering of the disease's victims. Similarly, we could continue to regret male dominance, and we could go on trying to minimize its effect - by continuing to extend the legal protection of women's rights, by insisting that they be paid equal wages for equal work, and so on. Nothing in sociobiology could imply otherwise. (1990: 78)

¹⁸ Sociobiology should not be confused with social Darwinism, the much earlier and largely discredited application of evolutionary theory to theories of social and moral development especially by Herbert Spencer.

It may well be that further careful research by sociobiologists will reveal a much clearer picture of the range of human behaviours which have been genetically determined by the processes of natural selection, and so enable us to understand the limiting factors which we have to deal with. However, biology also reveals that humans, like other organisms, are not only genetically determined but also shaped by the physical and social conditions in which they grow to maturity. Undoubtedly, therefore, we are partly determined by discourse. The mixture of weightings which should be assigned to the multitude of factors within each of these different areas of influence in determining human behaviours must be very complex and perhaps ultimately impossible to assess fully. However, continued development and application of evolutionary theory in sociology and other human sciences is likely to throw new light on who we are and what it is reasonable to suppose we can be. At least it is clear that humans have evolved a rather impressive combination of consciousness and reasoning power in the process of adapting so successfully to our environments. These characteristics have allowed us to develop both scientific and ethical understandings - in other words, systematic forms of consciousness which give us a greater degree of control over ourselves as well as our environment. But whilst on the basis of our increasing knowledge we exercise the power to dream up fabulous and unlimited futures for ourselves and to turn some of those dreams into reality, we are also finding that there are in fact limits to what we can and should do. Science of course deals with what we *can* do, while ethics is the study of what we *should* do. Biology and sociobiology are just two related areas of science which are defining the limits of what we can do, and they should be allowed - judiciously of course - to contribute to our ethical deliberations.

Another area of scientific inquiry in which evolutionary theory is playing a fundamental role, and which ought to be considered in devising epistemological and ethical (as well as political, educational and literary) theories, is the study of the workings of the brain. Various experts have attempted to describe for the laity recent developments in this field, together with their own particular hypotheses.¹⁹ One of the most convincing of these accounts has been given by the philosopher, Paul Churchland, (1995) in his book, *The Engine of Reason, the Seat of the Soul: a philosophical journey into the brain*. This is a fascinating and important work, but I only have space here to refer to a few points most relevant to my discussion. Churchland is a materialist who argues on the basis of

¹⁹ See for example Daniel Dennett (1991), Michael Gazzaniga (1994), Francis Crick (1995), Roger Penrose (1995) and David Chalmers (1996).

empirical research that the brain is a parallel processor (as distinct from the linear processors used in the common computer) which is responsible for all of the powers of mind including consciousness, reason and choice. All neural networks in animals work in the same way, using a mechanism which he calls 'vector coding', and so it is reasonable to suppose that all but the simplest animals possess a degree of consciousness. Churchland also argues that artificial neural networks will eventually be constructed to duplicate consciousness. Meanwhile primitive artificial brains (often just linear processing simulations of parallel processors) have been able to reproduce simple sensory representations and pattern recognition - including samples of the kinds of pattern recognition basic to vision and language. Churchland thinks that language is not unique to humans, but is a product of mental processes (i.e. vector coding) which are common to both humans and animals. Human language is, as far as we know, more highly developed and, particularly through writing, has provided us with an expanding repository of knowledge both of the commonsense variety and of the more elaborate and accurate type afforded by science. In this way we are able to build on the human achievements of the past. Churchland sees the content of human consciousness as largely constructed by culture, yet fundamentally conditioned by the subconscious, pre-linguistic mental processes which are the legacy of genetic evolution. For example what we call 'instinct' is certainly the product of innate vector coding processes, and it may be that the subconscious reasoning abilities which we recognise as intuition are of a similar kind.

An important aspect of vector coding is that it produces the neurological equivalent of maps, models or prototypes of the external realities conveyed to us through sensory impressions. We can have no way of directly knowing how accurate these prototypes really are; however, a degree of functional 'accuracy' or referentiality is guaranteed by the fact that our construction of them is sufficiently well adapted to our environment to have ensured the survival of our species. These prototypes exist at all of the different levels of processing in our brains, from basic visual pattern recognitions up to large linguistic and cultural constructs. Commonsense knowledge is just such a prototypical model of the world, and is therefore capable of further unconscious adaptation as our physical and social environments change. Moreover, the recording of these prototypes in language allows us to reflect consciously upon them and to refine them through the application of communicable, methodical processes such as those of science and mathematics. Churchland shows for example how science advances by the application of analogical thinking, a clear instance being the way our understanding of the nature and behaviour of light has been sharpened by

comparing it to both a wave and a particle, items with which we are familiar through direct everyday experience. Hence Churchland says,

...the role of learned prototypes and their continual redeployment in new domains of phenomena [is] central to the scientific process. Specific rules or 'laws of nature' play an undeniably important but nonetheless secondary role, mostly in the social business of communicating or teaching scientific skills. One's scientific understanding is lodged primarily in one's acquired hierarchy of structural and dynamical prototypes, not primarily in a set of linguistic formulas.

In parallel fashion...our knowledge of a language may well be embodied in a hierarchy of prototypes for verbal sequences that admit of varied instances and indefinitely many combinations, rather than a set of specific rules-to-be-followed. (143)

The construction of prototypes therefore appears to be fundamental to all thinking; indeed, it is the very stuff of concept formation. It is easy to see how the deployment of analogies underlies the processes of description, criticism and creativity. They are most clearly seen, perhaps, in the linguistic devices of metaphor and metonymy. The use of models is no less basic in areas of social understanding such as politics, law and morality.

Moral knowledge could be seen, then, as a set of learned prototypical examples of social behaviours such as 'cruelty and kindness, avarice and generosity, treachery and honour, mendacity and honesty' (144) rather than a collection of rules or principles. And therefore, Churchland argues,

...moral learning will be a matter of slowly generating a hierarchy of moral prototypes, presumably from a substantial number of relevant *examples* of the moral kinds at issue. Hence the relevance of stories and fables, and above all the ongoing relevance of the parental example of interpersonal behaviour, and parental commentary on and persistent guidance of childhood behaviour. (144)

Effective moral learning will arm children against the corruptions of self-deception, self-service, group-thinking and fanaticism. The most penetrating moral insight will be exercised by those who can see a situation in more than one way and who can judge the accuracy and relevance of those competing interpretations. What will be required is a rich moral imagination combined with powerful critical abilities, and here a distinct advantage will be gained from an education which brings ethical reasoning to bear on a wide range of textual experiences in order to supplement the child's necessarily limited life experience.

This process sounds like the beginnings of an ethically aware approach to critical social literacy. Reliable theory of all kinds will be of some use in developing and teaching such a program, but what will be most effective in educating the student, according to Churchland's account, is the modelling of real life experiences (especially in narratives), judging the relative value of the

different insights gained through those models, and then putting that wisdom to the test in their own experience. Colin Lankshear's (1994) discussion paper on critical literacy seems to be in keeping with this approach, when he points out that critical judgement of a particular discourse (which we may now define as a relatively coherent set of prototypes) only becomes possible when one is enabled to step outside it by entering another discourse. For example I have tried in this study to critique the discourse of post-structuralism from the point of view of the discourses of ethics and evolutionary theory. Even within wide-ranging discourses like ethics and biology there are many conflicting models, each of which can provide perspectives from which it is possible to criticise the others. However, evolutionary epistemology supports the contention that texts are at least partially judged against experiences which are non-linguistic, non-discursive - i.e. physical and social experiences which are felt in the brain - and that the ultimate test is whether they help or hinder our survival as a species. Clearly these biological limits to the adoption of discursive models of the real world still leave plenty of room for disagreements which in our society do not, in the short term at least, seem to threaten the transmission of the individual's genes - though there are of course societies in which people are killed for their political or religious views. One might, therefore, expect that discussion in our critical literacy classrooms would remain fairly open-ended and lively.

While Churchland has given a very plausible account of the construction of consciousness and creativity by the computational processes of the recurrent neural networks of the brain (and hence the possibility of building an artificial brain), he does not discuss the existence and nature of free will. However, free will, or at least the ability to choose between rival interpretations (i.e. agency), seems to be implied in all that he says about the ability of the brain to construct models, to reflect upon their accuracy and to act upon reasoned judgements. The invisibility to consciousness of much of the processing which goes on in the brain means that the reasons for most of our everyday decisions remain a mystery to us. It is plausible, therefore, to suppose that these decisions might in fact be fully determined by an extremely complex conjunction of innate, learned and environmental factors, but since we will probably never be able to describe these determinations fully we will remain incapable of accurately predicting behaviour. Thus we will retain at least the *illusion* of free will.

But what more do we expect of the concept of free will anyway? Perhaps all we need is the occasional reassurance, upon reflection, that we have been unconsciously making generally appropriate responses to the constantly changing conditions of our lives, and the feeling that, faced with a difficult choice, we are able to consciously deploy our powers of symbolic representation

in reflecting, analysing, imagining alternative actions and predicting consequences, in order finally to will to do one thing or another. In constructing this description of what free will might mean to us I have found myself constrained to reintroduce the term 'will' at the end, thereby making my definition circular. The fact is that brain science has not yet satisfactorily explained the nature of what we call 'will', let alone what we call 'free will'. Francis Crick (1994: 265-268) sees 'free will' as an illusion created by our inability to describe to ourselves all the reasons for our 'choices', and 'will' as a mental operation which may have a precise location in the brain. He recounts the case of a woman who had suffered localised and temporary brain damage and who reported upon recovery how she had lost her desire to act while retaining her normal awareness of herself and her surroundings. Thus Crick is able to suggest an exact site in the brain which is at least associated with the will.

When it comes to morality and law, however, the question of whether or not free will is an illusion becomes much more important than any psychological need to *feel* that we are rational and free agents. Here we are confronted with the question of moral responsibility. If free will is an illusion, then morality and law cannot hold us personally responsible for our actions, and thus the role of moral and legal codes in society is simply that of another social mechanism which has been constructed by natural selection for determining adaptive behaviour. Roger Penrose (1995) faces this issue squarely in his extraordinary attempt to explain consciousness in monist (i.e. scientific materialist rather than dualist) terms as the result of the evolution of non-algorithmic quantum processes in the brain. Ultimately he remains speculative and vague about the causes of free will, but he predicts that a new theory of the quantum-state reduction process will be needed to explain the phenomenon of consciousness, and that this will show that free will resides somehow in the indeterminacy of quantum states prior to their reduction. He argues that such a new theory - a quantum-gravitational theory - will be necessary in any case to resolve the present conflict between the two most fundamental, powerful and experimentally best supported theories in modern science: quantum mechanics and Einstein's theory of general relativity. Churchland agrees with Penrose's view that non-algorithmic processes are necessary in producing the powers of the brain, including consciousness, but rejects his hypothesis that these non-algorithmic processes are the result of quantum operations. Churchland (1995: 246-250) points out that the vector coding employed in the parallel processing used by both natural and artificial neural networks is in itself non-algorithmic since it is an analogue rather than a digital process. However, Churchland has

based his objections on the material contained in Penrose's (1990) earlier book, *The Emperor's New Mind*, and he remains silent about the question of exactly how free will can be created by vector processing.

Even more startling than Penrose's approach to resolving the problem of free will and determinism is that of the mathematical physicist, Frank Tipler, (1996) who has produced a controversial work entitled, *The Physics of Immortality: Modern Cosmology, God and the Resurrection of the Dead*. Based on an evolutionary view of the universe and a thorough knowledge of particle physics, this is a serious mathematical and empirical argument for the existence of God (or what Tipler also calls the 'Omega Point'), heaven and hell, the resurrection of the dead, and the reconciliation of free will and determinism. Paul Davies, (1994) commenting on an earlier version of Tipler's theory, points out that it depends on particular physical models of the universe - especially in its last phases - proving to be correct. However, Tipler has proposed a number of empirical tests which will be performed on certain predictions of his theory, using the extremely high-powered particle accelerators which are currently under construction. Also his book contains a technical appendix for scientists which allows them to check his mathematical reasoning. If, indeed, Tipler's theory survives these tests there will be more reason to believe that our sense of a degree of freedom of choice is not an illusion.

Churchland and other experts in neuro-science have more to say about the implications of brain science for our understanding of morality and ethics, but the above account will suffice to set the scene. I will return to some of these ideas in tracing the outlines of a new synthesis in ethics, and in discussing the literary texts introduced in Chapter 3. But first I will illustrate briefly how some attempts to construct post-structuralist-pragmatist-postmodern approaches to ethics have offered us ways of coping with the bewildering pluralism, relativism and incipient nihilism which characterise postmodernity, and how these approaches make more sense within an evolutionary framework.

3. Post-structuralist ethics: the limits of language

In an unpublished paper, (1993) 'The Turn to Ethics in the 1990s', and later in his book, (1994) *Ethics, Theory and the Novel*, David Parker provides a lucid introduction to some significant recent developments in literary theory and moral philosophy. Parker notes a number of striking features of literary criticism in the 70s and 80s:

1. the lack of interest among literary theorists in the relationship between ethics and literature, in spite of the fact that it has been an era of great ferment in moral philosophy;

2. the persistence of interest in moral interpretations of texts at the level of undergraduate pedagogy, influenced by a critical tradition 'formed by the likes of Aristotle, Pope, Dr Johnson, Matthew Arnold, Henry James, F.R. Leavis and Lionel Trilling'; (Parker 1993: 2)

3. the burgeoning of 'engaged, urgent, practice-oriented literary theory... concerned with [political] issues of race, gender, class and sexuality'; (3)

4. the implicitly ethical nature of political and post-structuralist criticism in their concern that the 'logic of binary oppositions is also a logic of subordination and domination'; (4)

5. the development by some forms of feminism of 'a picture of human flourishing not simply in terms of "thin" concepts such as justice and equality but also drawing on "thicker" conceptions of human character which tend to revalue such goods as connectedness, emotional responsiveness and care as alternatives to an allegedly masculinist concern with moral autonomy, rationality and obligation'; (4, 5)

6. the privileging by some forms of feminism and much neo-Marxist criticism of politics over ethics, where ethics is always suspect and in need of deconstruction because it 'legitimizes by universalising into a system of binary oppositions the characteristics of one group or class versus another'. (7)

Into this ferment, Parker argues, following the classicist and moral philosopher Martha Nussbaum, there is a great need to inject 'the organising questions of moral philosophy'. (3) In particular he makes an eloquent plea for an ethics of non-judgmentalism, 'an ethical vocabulary in which to articulate the humanly destructive impulses that can lurk precisely in the thirst for righteousness, including political righteousness.' (9) Parker admits the difficulty of talking about ethical inquiry 'post-Marx, post-Nietzsche, post-Saussure and post-Derrida' (10) but he points out that in recent years there has been a distinct move by deconstructionists and their commentators to make explicit the previously tacit ethics of post-structuralist theory and criticism. Here he cites

minor elements of the work of Kristeva, Derrida and de Man; and major texts such as: Barbara Johnson, (1987) *A World of Difference*; J. Hillis Miller, (1987) *The Ethics of Reading*; Tobin Siebers, (1988) *The Ethics of Criticism*; Simon Critchley, (1992) *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Lévinas*; and Geoffrey Galt Harpham, (1992) *Getting it Right: Language, Literature and Ethics*.²⁰

Parker goes on to suggest some reasons why deconstruction has seemed antipathetic to ethics in the past and has been so slow in engaging with it. One reason is that deconstruction 'has insisted that literary meaning is finally undecidable, so the very notion of determinate "moral questions" or "dilemmas" is defeated in the end by instabilities within language itself.' (12) Another reason is that 'deconstruction has presented the inner life of moral deliberation, intentionality and choice not as something prior to language [as we have seen Churchland does - at least in part] but as a mere effect of language. Thus the supposedly autonomous rational subject of Kantian ethics is decentred into the various different discourses of which he is constituted.' (12) Against these difficulties Parker argues that deconstructionists, such as de Man, offer 'a set of false alternatives: either subjectivity is a transcendental signified or it is just an effect of language; either morality is grounded in such metaphysical concepts as "man", "love", or "self" or it is nothing but a "language aporia".' (13)

One pathway between these extremes has been suggested by the literary critic Geoffrey Harpham's (1992) radical rethinking of ethics in the light of post-structuralist literary theories. This approach is designed, he says, to go beyond left-wing, right-wing and anti-ethical assumptions which hinder the debate about the nature and relevance of ethics today. In his book *Getting it Right: Language, Literature and Ethics* Harpham locates ethics in the acts of making and reading texts rather than simply in the texts themselves. In trying 'to understand what constitutes "ethics itself," to understand the *ought*, the "resisted imperative," that centres all ethical discourses', he demonstrates that

... 'otherness' touches all aspects of ethics, beginning with the most important ethical terms, such as 'freedom', 'obligation', 'subject', and 'ought' itself. All of these, when used in a specifically ethical context, are inhabited and inhibited by othernesses, energies that contradict their manifest meanings. The phenomenon of 'otherness' applies equally... to the obligations of the individual, the structure of ethical terms, the subject as constructed by ethics, and even to the position of ethical discourse with respect to other discourses. Like any institutionalised and professional discourse, ethics seeks clarity and precision; it posits rules, laws, conditions, implications, entailments, values, hierarchies. In the case of ethics, however, all this positing is both necessitated and frustrated by a radical and

²⁰ Another interesting attempt to draw out the ethical implications of poststructuralism can be found in John D. Caputo, (1989) 'Disseminating Originary Ethics and the Ethics of Dissemination'. He sees the proliferation of meanings opened up by deconstruction as fostering an ethics of openness to life.

ineradicable unclarity built into the discourse itself. If this unclarity could be respected as constitutive, if the quest for a certain kind of lucidity could be suspended, then ethics might discover some path between, or other than, the depressing reduction to strictly logical rules and a more or less covert utopianism, paths that largely define the possibilities for ethics today. (2,3)

Harpham's approach employs post-structuralist concepts in order to portray ethics as a potentially liberating rather than simply limiting activity.

Harpham also faces up to one of the great puzzles of ethics: how is it that a sense of morality can be universally shared by all peoples and yet particular moral codes can differ from community to community? In discussing this phenomenon he makes the following distinction between ethics and morality:

My candidate for a truly universal imperative, a law which would work the way that Kant, for example, saw such a law as working, is 'Act on principle'. This apparently vacuous but truly noncontingent imperative does not specify or warrant any particular act, choice, or decision. Ethical legitimacy for particular acts can only be claimed through a synergistic convergence of 'Act on principle' and some more definite or specific code - an other within ethics that, out of respect for a traditional distinction, I call morality... What interests me is the lamination of two kinds of prescription, with the moral representing a class of contingently desirable acts - 'Honor thy father and thy mother'; 'Don't steal that book'; 'Help your brother tie his shoes' - whose contingency is transcended but not fully cancelled by the appeal to the universal. Saturated with particularity and circumstance, morality fuses interest with principle, both fulfilling and negating the global imperative on which it depends for its effectiveness. (3)

Harpham tries to account for the universality of ethics 'by exploring language as a primary site of the phenomenon of a "global" imperative operating in tension with local choices and acts.' (3,4) However, he does not see language as an agent *in itself* which determines its users' moral values - though particular languages might enshrine particular cultural values. Rather, he argues that the use of language by its very nature - its tendency to disseminate rather than fully determine meaning - requires certain kinds of choices which are essential to ethics, and that it is this which makes language itself seem to have an ethical dimension. Harpham then turns to the psychoanalytic concept of 'conversion' as another site of universality, tracing it through Freudian analysis to the ethics of narrative. Finally he investigates the role of ethics in literary creation, commenting on the oddity of the fact that 'the process of creation has been considered to be beneath the attention of the critical community concerned more with the creativity of understanding than with the understanding of creativity.' (5) Throughout his book Harpham maintains that ethics cannot ultimately be disengaged from other areas of human practice, 'but rather that it is best seen as a factor of "imperativity" immanent in, but not confined to, the practices of language, analysis, narrative, and creation'. (5)

In his final chapter Harpham discusses Joseph Conrad's *The Secret Agent* in the light of Conrad's comments on the creative process as recorded in letters and prefaces. Harpham's deconstructive analysis of Conrad's ironic method leads him to conclude that literature is incapable of promoting the good without ambiguity, and that consequently it is the writers and readers of literature who are obliged to take the responsibility and risk of making the moral choices which texts confront them with.

Occurring under the sign of irony, creations, as written fictions so palpably and painfully demonstrate, are not moral agents... for their effect is never unambivalent. Those looking to literature for the promotion of the good seek agency in the wrong place, for everything in a creation is shadowed and compromised by its others. Creations are rather the cause or the effect of agency - the burden of which, however, falls on those who must make decisions based on evidence that is conflicting and imprecise, on those who must choose and act on principle despite the suspicion that principle is 'at bottom identical' with interest. There may be, as some have argued,²¹ a textual 'imperative' *not* to decide on a correct or final interpretation and *not* to permit the emigration of moral truths from the text to the world. Conceived in this way, 'literature' is a figure for agency's anarchic ungroundedness. But anarchy bears its own obligations; and the horizon of indecision is reached whenever necessity imposes upon agents a fresh imperative to hazard simplicity despite its secrets: to understand, to make, to create and recreate not just the text and its meaning, but themselves and the world. (219)

This brief account of Harpham's work throws light on the distinction between the terms 'ethics' and 'morality' and provides the beginnings of an explanation of why ethics is persistent and inescapable in literature, theory and criticism. It also offers a glimpse of one form ethics has taken in response to post-structuralism. Moreover, his conclusion rings true to our experience as readers and writers and to our sense of ourselves as relatively free moral agents: that while language and literature are saturated in the ethical, they cannot relieve us of the final responsibility of choosing, among the options offered, that which after rational analysis and discussion we must simply trust to be good.

While I would argue that Harpham tends to exaggerate the indeterminacy of language and fictions, he nevertheless illustrates an important consideration: that language is indeed limited in its ability to define its referents. Hence ethical theories will reveal gaps, silences and contradictions, and will be open to differently interested interpretations. The same is true of moral tales. Such 'dissemination' might be seen as a source of frustration to moral philosophers, ethical critics, and ordinary citizens, yet perhaps it might also be valued as a condition of human freedom. Dissemination leaves room for ethical choice because it generates possibilities, alternatives and uncertainties. A completely determinate ethics, with its universal principles, exhaustive rules and

²¹ Most famously, for example, J. Hillis Miller (1987) in his book, *The Ethics of Reading*.

illustrative fables - if such a thing were possible - would obligate all of the people all of the time. This would so circumscribe our lives that it would probably be unbearable, accustomed as we are to living with ethical uncertainties and taking more or less calculated moral risks. Such constraining circumstances might be expected to evoke a sharp rise in dissidence among some people and lassitude among others - as the experience of totalitarian regimes would seem to demonstrate.

An evolutionary view of the development of language, culture, morality and ethical reasoning provides a fairly plausible explanation of the less than completely determinate nature of these phenomena. All of them can be regarded as mechanisms by which individual organisms have adapted to their physical and social environments. In other words, as they have emerged incrementally and randomly within populations over long periods of time, they have been selected by their survival value in the context of particular environments. Thus the mechanisms do not have to work perfectly or fit together completely coherently to be effective; they just have to be sufficiently referential and determinate to enable the genes of the organism to be passed on. Biologists have noted this quality in all of our physiological adaptations too: we are the products of a natural *bricolage* and therefore may be by nature *bricoleurs*. But we do not act totally by trial and error: having evolved as reasoning animals we are able in varying degrees to chart and correct our course in advance.

4. Pragmatist ethics: the limits of culture

In the essay cited above, where he depicts ethics as somewhat marginalised by post-structuralism, David Parker (1993) introduces a more viable approach to ethics in recent moral philosophy, particularly in the work of Charles Taylor (1985, 1989) in *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers* and *Sources of the Self*. He gives a brief account of Taylor's conception of the self and its relationship to language, the importance of practical reason and moral intuitions, and the way Taylor rejects post-structuralism's reduction of knowledge and social relationships to language games. He advances a strong case for pursuing the relevance to the theory and practice of literary criticism of the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, Martha Nussbaum, Bernard Williams, John Rawls and Richard Rorty, all of whom have some affinities with Taylor and can be described as ethical pragmatists.

Parker also notes that the 'turn toward the ethical' which he has identified within literary studies is closely connected to a turn to the literary within ethics. According to Richard Rorty, the culture of positivism is being replaced in our time by the culture of pragmatism. Ethics is ceasing to look for its foundations in metaphysics, and is turning to our traditions, to literature and the arts, as sites of the culture's deepest moral questioning. However, there is a danger in this, Parker warns, since those traditions can enshrine 'the systematic disempowerment of important groups, such as women, homosexuals and racial minorities.' (22) Thus there will always be a need for 'political criticism as an external perspective on the ethnocentric, conservative tendencies of anti-foundationalist ethics.' (23) In the end it seems that Parker looks to an on-going dialogue between various approaches to ethics, including feminist and Habermasian universalist ethics, but his preference is still for Taylor whose 'tradition-based argument...doesn't set itself against Enlightenment ideals [of human rights and equality founded in sceptical reason], but treats them as an integral part of that full range of mutually-conflicting goods we actually live by, and need to live by in order to live as well as we can.' (24)

In the light of Parker's last point, and keeping in mind the notion of the (albeit limited) freedom of the subject which I am defending in this study, I reiterate that I do not see how ethics could ever supply a systematic answer to all our moral dilemmas. Furthermore, if it did, such a total system would spell the end of freedom of choice. Interestingly, deconstruction, the enemy of totalising systems, provides one explanation of why this is so - a point which I take up in the next section.

Whereas Harpham, from his post-structuralist perspective, found an explanation for the universality of ethical concerns in language, Parker's

pragmatist view seems to locate this universality in the fact that everywhere human beings negotiate with one another in maintaining social structures. Both approaches entail an ineradicable moral relativism. Harpham locates this indeterminacy in the openness of texts to individual interpretations, while Parker also locates it in cultural differences. Yet neither of them sees relativism as a fundamental problem: rather it is a welcome element in human diversity and freedom. Parker, however, acknowledges that moral relativism is often the occasion for bitter conflict between individuals and (sub-)cultures when he pleads that one of the 'mutually-conflicting goods' we live by should be non-judgmentalism, or tolerance. But is this not a call for the universal acceptance of a moral precept? Indeed it is, and engagement in the ensuing arguments is integral to the pragmatists' commitment to ethics. However, the ineradicability of relativism can be seen in Parker's assertion that the goods we need to live by are mutually conflicting. As I have illustrated previously, against the value of tolerance we must also set the need, in certain circumstances, to condemn destructive behaviours. Thus pragmatism does not deny the necessity of ethical analysis and negotiation: rather we are *obliged* by the need to maintain social relationships to engage in a constant process of defining the moral concepts which will guide our conduct, negotiating between differing views about what concepts are relevant, and defining how they should be applied in differing circumstances. Ethical considerations, then, are always situated in cultural practice, and the moral concepts which will be most immediately useful are those which Bernard Williams (1985) describes as 'thick' - i.e. virtues such as courage, loyalty and compassion - rather than the 'thinner' concepts of rationalist ethics, such as Kant's categorical imperative. Pragmatism in ethics accepts relativism as a product of the individual and cultural difference which is a condition of life, but it eschews nihilism in its commitment to renegotiating the compromises which are necessary to survival and human flourishing. Cultural differences, viewed in the light of this commitment, are both a limit on what we can achieve together and an opportunity for change and growth.

There is nothing in this approach to ethics which is incapable of a deeper evolutionary explanation. The generation of biological and cultural diversity is necessary to the process of evolution, driven as it is at a still deeper level by genetic mutation. Changes in the structure and behaviour of species are the result of natural selection of those mutations best suited to changes in the environment, which are in the final analysis explained by the second law of thermodynamics. Progress from simple to more complex biological structures seems to be the product of a combination of natural selection and the 'order for free' which Kauffman shows is inherent in the slowly changing complexity

arising from the decay of thermodynamic systems poised on the relatively stable cusp between completely static order and totally dynamic chaos. Such natural progress appears to explain the emergence of consciousness, reason, language, society and culture, and the necessity of both stability and change in our social structures. The theory of evolution suggests that while certain natural laws determine the fundamental conditions of life there may be only so much that is 'given' about the local biological, social, cultural and hence moral adaptations of human communities: rather these are strategies for survival patched together according to largely pragmatic 'considerations' - hence the similarity and diversity of individuals, societies, cultures, and moral codes. But exactly how much is given, and by what forces at work in our lives, remains a moot question.

5. Postmodern ethics: the limits of theory

Natural selection theorists see care for others, and the reasonableness of extending that care beyond our immediate family, ethnic group and species, as founded in human and ultimately animal nature through the evolution of both instinct and reason as adaptive mechanisms. In their belief that humans possess an innate moral sense they are similar to the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (1993) who asserts in his book *Postmodern Ethics* that humans possess a fundamental impulse 'to be for the Other' which leads them to form social relationships. However, Bauman, like Harpham and Parker, does not offer any evolutionary explanations for this phenomenon. Instead, following the philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas and supported by rational and empirical arguments, he claims that 'being for the Other' precedes and gives rise to that 'being with the Other' which is society. And (since we are social animals, the sociobiologist would add) it is being for and with the Other which constitutes our sense of the self as a separate identity, albeit a complex one which is intertwined with other identities. In more traditional terms, then, Bauman sees morality as founded on the fragile basis of individual conscience.

However, he also recognises the reality that humans are morally ambivalent: not fundamentally evil as some versions of Christian doctrine maintain, and not fundamentally good as some versions of humanism would have it, but a mixture of good and bad. Evolutionary theory takes this view too, and offers a scientific explanation for the phenomenon's genesis. As social animals, humans are the product of what Richard Dawkins (1976) calls 'the selfish gene', the drive to individual reproduction which is the engine of evolution and which has been working out its survival through the adaptive strategy of forming communal structures. Thus humans exhibit both rivalry and co-operation in their relationships with each other. Bauman argues that this moral ambivalence in human beings extends to the very nature of what we conceive to be good and bad. We can see this in evolutionary theory as well: thus rivalry can be good in producing more adaptive characteristics within species, and bad in the harm it can do to individuals; and cooperation can be bad in that it may lead ultimately to the death of the individual through an act of self-sacrifice, and good in that it may lead to the survival of the group. However, Bauman's notion of moral ambivalence extends more deeply than that. He describes morality as 'incurably *aporetic*', (11) defining 'aporia' as 'a contradiction that cannot be overcome, one that results in a conflict that cannot be resolved'. (8)

Few choices (and only those which are relatively trivial and of minor importance) are unambiguously good. The majority of moral choices are made between contradictory impulses. Most importantly, however, virtually every moral impulse, if acted upon in full, leads to immoral consequences (most characteristically, the impulse to care for the Other, when taken to its extreme, leads to the annihilation of the autonomy of the Other, to domination and oppression); yet no moral impulse can implement itself unless the moral actor earnestly strives to stretch the effort to the limit. The moral self moves, feels and acts in the context of ambivalence and is shot through with uncertainty. Hence the ambiguity-free moral situation has solely an utopian existence of the perhaps indispensable horizon and stimulus for a moral self, but not a realistic target of ethical practice. Seldom may moral acts bring complete satisfaction; responsibility that guides the moral person is always ahead of what has been and what can be done. All the efforts to the contrary notwithstanding, uncertainty is bound to accompany the condition of the moral self forever. Indeed, one can recognise the moral self by its uncertainty whether all that should have been done, has been. (11, 12)

In developing this notion of moral ambivalence which constitutes his postmodern ethics and sociology, Bauman's discussion also takes into account the implications of the post-structuralist-pragmatist insights which I have been discussing - i.e. the inherent instabilities and hence limitations of language and culture (and, as we have seen, to a lesser extent of science) which undermine the formation of totally compelling ethical theories. Thus ethics, when it has attempted to construct a completely rational foundationalist and universalist system of principles and precepts which would oblige people to behave morally, has succeeded only in generating conflicting systems each of which calls into question the foundations and universality of the others. And so long as ethics persists in this futile search for the fulfilment of its totalising ambitions it will be on the side of the controllers of society who want to manage every aspect of our lives and who are constantly tempted to resort to legislation in order to enforce their control. Thus Bauman argues that ethics is in danger of substituting moral heteronomy for moral autonomy, and of stifling our fundamental, non-rational moral sense in the process. Abandoning the illusions of the grand project of modern ethics for a more realistic, postmodern conception of morality holds out the paradoxical prospect of allowing us to do more rather than less good.

Bauman offers a detailed analysis of the difficulty of our predicament in a world of bewildering diversity and dramatic change which is largely - and ironically - beyond the control of the individuals whom modernity has been so successful first in creating and empowering, and then in fragmenting and disillusioning. The picture of postmodernity which Bauman paints is more than a little gloomy. Nor does he see, at this end of the modern experiment, any hope for the success of governments to legislate for morality, or of philosophers and educators to persuade us by rational means to be 'good'. Nevertheless, as Bauman points out, it was ever thus, and so our only hope, slim though it may be, must lie in individual conscience, that innate moral sense which he thinks is

perhaps uniquely human. (Darwin, however, did not think that altruism was confined to humans: even ants seem to behave unselfishly within their complex social structures, as A.S. Byatt, 1992, demonstrates in 'Morpho Eugenia'.) This does not mean that all laws are unnecessary, nor that philosophical analysis is denied its usefulness, but simply that we cannot rely on them alone to make people morally better. It also means that at times, as in Nazi Germany, both the philosophy and the laws of society can be evil, yet it is still incumbent upon citizens to follow their consciences, their innate sense of caring for others, and to resist inflicting socially sanctioned harm on their neighbours.

For Bauman, then, postmodernity is 'modernity without illusions...'

The 'illusions' in question boil down to the belief that the 'messiness' of the human world is but a temporary and repairable state, sooner or later to be replaced by the orderly and systematic rule of reason. The truth in question is that the 'messiness' will stay whatever we do or know, that the little orders and 'systems' we carve out in the world are brittle, until-further-notice, and as arbitrary and in the end contingent as their alternatives. (32, 33)

Evolutionary epistemology would agree with this statement, but only up to a point. One must remain sceptical about such absolute claims, including claims to a radical agnosticism. I object particularly to Bauman's use of the term 'arbitrary' in this context since I am not so sure that science cannot make progress towards more accurate representations of external reality through its methodical procedures for checking the validity of its hypotheses. However, I agree that the 'messiness' of human life is likely to resist forever all our technologies of control, though perhaps not our ability to understand it. Kauffman's (1995) account of complexity theory explains why. In thermodynamic systems poised between stasis and chaos tiny initial inputs can have vast and essentially unpredictable consequences. Thus, even if in the far distant future we could arrive at a physical theory of everything, we would still not be able to control or predict the unfolding of all events beyond a certain point.

Bauman goes on to say that postmodernity not only disillusion but also

brings 're-enchantment' of the world after the protracted and earnest, though in the end inconclusive, modern struggle to dis-enchant it (or, more exactly, the resistance to dis-enchantment, hardly ever put to sleep, was all along the 'postmodern thorn' in the body of modernity). The mistrust of human spontaneity, of drives, impulses and inclinations resistant to prediction and rational justification, has been all but replaced by the mistrust of unemotional, calculating reason. Dignity has been returned to emotions; legitimacy to the 'inexplicable', nay *irrational*, sympathies and loyalties which cannot 'explain themselves' in terms of their usefulness and purpose... The postmodern world is one in which *mystery* is no more a barely tolerated alien awaiting a deportation order... Fear of the void, that... most acute of psychological effects of modern Enlightenment, has been blunted and assuaged (though never quelled completely). (33)

If Bauman's statement about postmodernity's disillusionment was too positive, then this statement about its re-enchantment is too negative. The re-enchantment of the world in our times may be partly as he describes, residing in what I previously called a 'radical agnosticism', through which one learns to live with life's insoluble mysteries. But I also think that for many people today re-enchantment is occasioned by the dramatic turn which modernity's optimistic search for truth has taken in recent developments in science. For example there are Kauffman's reflections upon the mathematics of complexity theory, its startling applicability to both evolutionary biology and economics, and its implication that the evolution of human consciousness could be expected in this particular universe rather than being the result of some fantastic chance.²² Also there is the advent of the new developments in physics, especially in the fields of cosmology and quantum mechanics, with the metaphysical and ontological questions which they have raised. The remarkable proliferation of books on these subjects is a contemporary publishing phenomenon, attesting to a re-enchantment with at least some aspects of what science can reveal about the circumstances of our existence. I will have more to say on this subject in section 6 of the present chapter.

A different approach to postmodern ethics from Bauman's, one that is firmly based on new developments in evolutionary theory, has been adopted by Robert Wright (1995) in *The Moral Animal: Evolutionary Psychology and Everyday Life*. Wright presents a detailed account of a relatively recent increase in the power of evolutionary theory to explain many of the puzzles of human behaviour, illustrating them from the life of Charles Darwin and the Victorian society in which he lived. These developments have followed from the work in sociobiology which E.O. Wilson and Richard Dawkins synthesised and popularised in the mid-1970s. The last chapter of Wilson's (1975) book, *Sociobiology*, speculated on the implications of the study of the biological basis of animal behaviour for the study of human behaviour and particularly of ethics. It created such a storm of outrage that the extensive work on human behaviour of subsequent sociobiologists has been quietly carried out under other names, such as evolutionary psychology. What emerges from Wright's summary of this now substantial body of careful research is a description of human nature which challenges the anti-essentialism of so much structuralist, post-structuralist and

²² Of course, if one entertains the many universes theory of cosmology, then it could still be a fantastic chance that one of those universes just happened to be structured in such a way that conscious beings would evolve to reflect upon the improbability of their existence.

feminist thought, clinging as it does to the dogma that behaviour is largely shaped by culture and therefore (it is claimed) almost entirely malleable. Wright explains many of the theoretical and experimental findings of evolutionary psychology which strongly support the replacement of cultural determinism by biological determinism. This is an extremely sobering shift and one that will outrage those discourse theorists who subscribe to cultural determinism yet tacitly allow sufficient agency to themselves and others to attempt to reshape society by rewriting its discourses. Biological determinism seems, at first sight, to be less open to manipulation, or at least any attempt to manipulate it seems less morally acceptable, since eugenics, when applied to human populations, has a justifiably bad reputation.

But determinism is determinism, whether biological or cultural, and manipulation of human populations against their will is ethically questionable whether it is attempted through breeding programs or subtle forms of propaganda. No matter how one deals with the ethics of these activities it will be helpful to know what are the facts of the case: the question of what *can* be done is as relevant as the question of what *ought* to be done. It is apparent, as I have shown, that some post-structuralists in education circles are not addressing either question with an open mind. We need to know to what degree we are conditioned by nature and by nurture (indeed, we need to know how nurture itself is determined by nature), how these complex factors actually produce their effects, and to what extent, if any, we are free and able to manipulate them. Then the question of what we ought to do with this knowledge will have real applications.

Wright has much to say in his long book about the adaptive function - i.e. survival value - of the social behaviours and especially the moral codes which humans have evolved. All of it is fascinating and some of it may be considered politically incorrect in our prevailing social climate, yet it bears serious consideration. Particularly relevant to my immediate concerns, are his comments on 'the postmodern mind' (324-326) and 'postmodern morality'. (356-358) Wright characterises postmodernism as concerned with power rather than responsibility, and as self-referential, ironic, cynical, irreverent and absurdist. These attitudes are at least partly a result of evolutionary thinking, he suggests - certainly they are in keeping with it. The Darwinian explanation of morality is the reverse of what has been traditionally thought:

We believe the things - about morality, personal worth, even objective truth - that lead to behaviors that get our genes into the next generation. (Or at least we believe the kinds of things that, in the environment of our evolution, would have been likely to get our genes into the next generation.) It is the behavioral goals - status, sex, effective coalition, parental investment, and so on - that

remain steadfast while our view of reality adjusts to accommodate this constancy. What is in our genes' interests is what seems 'right' - morally right, objectively right, whatever sort of rightness is in order. (324, 325)

This explanation of our so-called 'higher' motives is deeply cynical and thoroughly disillusioning. It leads Wright to wonder whether the human animal can be a moral animal and, indeed, whether the word 'moral' can be anything but a joke. It is perhaps not at all surprising, therefore, that some post-structuralists have also arrived at the view that moral codes are really a political compromise formed by competing interest groups.

Nevertheless, Wright sees some possibilities for evolutionary ethics to create at least the potential for humans to be genuinely moral. The key lies in our evolved abilities of self-consciousness and analysis:

Morality, you could almost say, was designed to be misused by its own definition. We've seen what may be the rudiments of self-serving moralizing in our close relatives the chimpanzees as they pursue their agendas with righteous indignation. Unlike them, we can distance ourselves from the tendency long enough to see it - long enough, indeed, to construct a whole moral philosophy that consists essentially of attacking it. (344)

On this basis, Wright says, Darwin himself believed that humans are the only moral animals - or, according to my definitions of the terms, the only ethical animals. However, Wright warns us that we only have the technical ability to lead a truly examined life. 'Chronically subjecting ourselves to a true and bracing moral scrutiny, and adjusting our behaviour accordingly, is not something we were designed for. We are potentially moral animals - which is more than any other animal can say - but we aren't naturally moral animals. To be moral animals, we must realise how thoroughly we aren't'. (344)

Wright also makes an interesting point about free will, an essential component in our ability to be ethical. Since we are biologically determined - and that includes cultural determination, because culture itself is the product of biological evolution - free will is an illusion brought to us by adaptation. It is adaptive behaviour which allows us to genuinely believe that our motives are altruistic, when they are really at the deepest level selfish, and this belief allows us to be more convincing in persuading others to return our 'favours'. However, it is clear that Wright, following Darwin, thinks that rational analysis does open the way for genuine freedom of choice.

This view may not hold out great prospects for ethics education, though, since it depends on the extent to which the majority of people can be taught to analyse their own and others' motives in scientific terms. Wright points out that Darwin thought this skill would be confined to a few gentlemen, but of course

we now uphold the ideal of education for all. One result of the increased level of education in our time is that notions of our biological determinism are seeping through to the masses and threatening to undermine our deeply held belief in moral responsibility. Yet this belief had presumably evolved in order to make society more stable and thus enhance the possibility of the passing on of the individual's genes. No wonder then that we see today a law-and-order backlash: people are *instinctively* fearful of the breakdown of society when the courts become, as it seems to them, too lenient towards offenders.

If in this situation ethics education can achieve anything at all, there are two things it might usefully do. One would be to teach us that, since our behaviour is largely determined by forces beyond our control, we ought to suspect our own motives (including our fears) more deeply. The other would be to teach us, for exactly the same reason, to be more tolerant of the pretensions and failings of our fellows. Thus we might learn to be tougher on ourselves and kinder towards offenders. But, paradoxically, an education in evolutionary and postmodern theory should also teach us the *limits* of analysis (or theorising) and of education in bringing about individual and social change. Hence, as well as educating everyone in ethics, we (I use the first person plural deliberately since I believe the program I am advocating must be carried out openly and democratically) must also change the social environment in ways which will work with our instincts to produce the results we want. Animal and human behaviour is a result of what Wright calls 'knobs and tunings': the 'knobs' are genetically determined propensities and the 'tunings' are the way these are shaped by our environment as we grow up. Thus education is needed to give us as clear an understanding as possible of the nature and possibilities of our lives, and politics is needed to adjust the conditions of our physical and social environment in ways which will best enable us to achieve our realistic goals. This is clearly a complex and delicate procedure. Our leaders will need to be highly educated in evolutionary psychology as well as economics, politics, law and so on. They will also need to be educated in ethics and in a genuine understanding of and commitment to the ideals of democracy in order to avoid the temptation to become autocratic.

More could be said about how to make such a program workable, but already it is beginning to sound like a charter for Plato's republic - indeed, for all its attempt to remain realistic, it is a very idealistic notion. Wright, like Bauman, is justifiably phlegmatic about the possibilities for evolutionary ethics, politics and education. There are indeed limits to what theorising and its resultant technologies can actually achieve since the circumstances of life are so complex and perhaps ultimately beyond our control. Perhaps Bauman is right: all we can

do in the end is to trust to the moral impulses and reasoning powers which life has given us, and use them as best we can to deal with whatever contingencies arise. Our species has survived so far, and we may well be endowed with the resources to adapt to the threats which face us. Indeed, there does seem to be emerging, for obvious selfish motives, a sense that we need to co-operate globally in order to survive, and herein lies a ray of hope.

6. Quantum ethics: the return of metaphysics

A radical synthesis of evolutionary, post-structuralist and metaphysical ethics has been advanced by Don Cupitt (1987) in *The Long-Legged Fly: A Theology of Language and Desire*. Although his theory is based on the (reductionist?) notion that there is nothing beyond the energy-matter-space-time continuum of the universe, Cupitt sees ethics as founded in the nature of this fundamental reality which he views in an ultimately religious way. If it is still possible to speak of God, it is for Cupitt as the ground of our being, or as the quantum void from which all possibilities spring. This 'horizontal' theology tries to take into account recent developments in linguistics, deconstruction, quantum physics, evolution, psychoanalysis and so on, and is perhaps one of the few viable directions for metaphysics today - if one can still speak of such a non-transcendental philosophy as metaphysical. The idea of the Good, if it exists independently of our thinking at all, is in Cupitt's view immanent in the structure of a universe which has given rise to conscious beings capable of reflecting on ethical issues, in spite of the limitations of language.

A similarly speculative attempt to forge a new, and in its way postmodern, world view, founded on quantum physics and integrating a variety of other disciplines, including evolutionary theory, is to be found in the work of Danah Zohar and Ian Marshall. (1994) Their book, *The Quantum Society: Mind, Physics and a New Social Vision*, explores, through reference to their own work and an impressive array of other thinkers and researchers, the notion that the strange sub-atomic world of quantum events and relationships determines the nature of ourselves and the universe of which we are an integral part. They reject the dualistic split between spirit and matter, mind and body, but their materialist philosophy is not exactly that of modernism which bases its beliefs on Newtonian physics and Darwinian evolution - a tradition within which James Rachels' evolutionary ethics sits comfortably enough. In fact Zohar and Marshall see the movement from modernity to postmodernity as quintessentially the movement from the mechanistic, reductionist view of reality to the quantum view - the ideas of the new physics of quantum mechanics and cosmology which have been given currency by the writings of Paul Davies, Stephen Hawking and others.²³ Newtonian physics presents us with a world which is thoroughly logical: for example light is considered as either a series of waves or a stream of particles, and movements of projectiles can be predicted with pinpoint accuracy. These ideas work quite adequately within the scale of human

²³ Many popularised presentations of quantum mechanics are available apart from Zohar and Marshall's. In my opinion Roger Penrose's versions in *The Emperor's New Mind* and *Shadows of the Mind* are the clearest. I do not intend to attempt an adequate account here.

affairs. But when we observe events on the minute scales of particle physics or the vast scales of cosmology, the counter-intuitive, seemingly illogical theories of relativity and quantum mechanics must be brought to bear. Indeed, scientists now recognise that quantum mechanics must be used to explain chemical reactions, the behaviour of DNA, laser beams, neutron stars, and the operation of neurons in the brain.

In discussing the implications of quantum mechanics scientists use such unsettling terms as 'indeterminacy', 'uncertainty', 'superposition', 'both/and', 'action at a distance', 'non-locality', 'uncaused events', and 'virtual transitions'. These surprising concepts have captured the popular imagination and, to borrow Bauman's terms, are partly responsible for the 're-enchantment' of the world following our 'dis-illusionment' with the destructive results of the great Marxist and capitalist utopian visions of modernity. Science since the Enlightenment has promised to dis-enchant the world by delivering us from the fear of the gods and placing our destiny in our own hands. However, the massive individual, social, political and environmental disasters which characterise this century have shattered the faith of many in the ability of science and technology to solve our problems. One of the greatest problems facing the world today is that the power mongers, the politicians and the directors of multi-national (or as Bauman, 1993: 232, calls them, 'non-national') corporations, are unlikely to relinquish the power which technology delivers to them, or the belief that the disasters caused by the side effects of technology can be solved simply by the application of more technology. On the other hand the total rejection of science and technology by extreme greens and new-agers, or by those post-structuralists who see science as simply another discourse with no better claim to reliable knowledge than tarot card reading, is not the answer either.

Zohar and Marshall cautiously steer a passage between these poles of total faith in or rejection of science, charting the way forward through a deeper scientific understanding of the world, the self, society and technology based on the new physics. Central to their restoration of faith, hope and brotherly love to society is their proposal that quantum physics may explain the evolution of the human brain as the most complex structure in the universe. They also argue, together with Roger Penrose, that quantum states and events in the brain are responsible for consciousness, free will, and our sense of ourselves both as individuals and as integrally connected to everything else in our social and natural environments. Thus humans, as emergent self-ordering systems, are the highest expression of the fluctuations in the quantum void, the underlying sea of potentiality which particle physicists see as the fundamental reality, and which Zohar and Marshall, like Cupitt, identify with the traditional idea of a God that

literally creates us in its own (quantum) image. From this statement of what *is*, Zohar and Marshall appear to commit the naturalistic fallacy by making the logically forbidden leap to what *ought* to be. But perhaps their argument is valid here, for if we are (partially) free individuals who are also integrally connected to and shaped by everything else in the universe, then care for ourselves is at the same time care for everything else. Thus our moral responsibility as the highest expression of the consciousness of the universe emerges in their description of a quantum-driven evolutionary process.

Zohar and Marshall offer this scenario as an immanently metaphysical world-view, in which, metaphorically speaking, the horizontal dimension links us across space to everything else in the universe and the vertical dimension links us to the divine through our role in the evolutionary process across time. Hence a sense of wonder and of the sacred is restored to human existence, and life regains meaning, purpose, faith, hope, love and joy.

A further point - a sobering one - needs to be made about this perhaps too fervent vision: Zohar and Marshall demonstrate a clear understanding of post-structuralist ideas (which they call 'deconstructive post-modernity', 111ff). Whilst they vehemently reject the way some deconstructive thought seems to undermine all values, they recognise that post-structuralism has raised issues which 'are the central philosophical problem of today'. (115) No longer can we be confident of grasping absolute truth, since all our attempts are thwarted by the unstable nature of discourse. However, this does not mean that we must go to the other extreme of valuing all knowledge claims equally and rejecting all criteria for judging truth and error. Post-structuralism offers one explanation (and evolutionary epistemology another) why knowledge can always only be partial, but it does not prevent us from achieving closer approximations to truth through the application of criteria such as diligent comparison of all points of view, careful observation, the formation of reasonable hypotheses, and assessment of the results of predictions. The alternatives to this moderate approach to truth claims are, on the one hand, epistemological and ethical nihilism and the retreat into the aesthetics and politics of post-structuralist free play; and on the other, the deluded certainties of fundamentalism.

Zohar and Marshall, espousing the so-called 'quantum logic' of *both/and* to supplement the mechanistic logic of *either/or*, cautiously tread this middle path. They advance their knowledge-claims tentatively, subjecting them to the criteria listed above, but they also act on the ethical implications of their beliefs by sharing them enthusiastically in the hope of pointing a way out of the postmodern morass. Thus they have summarised the ethical and political implications of their philosophy for the reconstruction of society in a series of

imperatives: the 'new social reality,' they declare, '...must be "holistic"... it must go beyond the individual/collective dichotomy... it must be plural... it must be responsive... it must be "bottom-up", or emergent... it must be "green"... it must be spiritual... it must be in dialogue with [quantum] science...' (7-10) Their explanation of these guidelines, at times directly supported by the new physics while at others only modelled upon it, amounts to a synthesis of evolutionary, postmodern and metaphysical theory, thereby offering renewed hope for the world in an open-minded way which perhaps can avoid the totalitarian propensities of previous utopian visions.

Zohar and Marshall's philosophy is, of course, a version of the evolutionism whose roots extend to a time before Darwin gave scientific credibility to the theory of the evolution of species by his marshalling of evidence in support of the mechanism of natural selection. For example Tennyson's *In Memoriam*, composed between 1832 and 1845, contains in section 118 a reference to the evolution of man as 'The herald of a higher race', and to the notion that individuals have the power to cooperate with this process in order to 'Move upward, working out the beast, / And let the ape and tiger die'. (1954: 363-364) However, recent developments in evolutionary theory have dramatically increased its power to describe the dynamics of the universe, from the Big Bang to the emergence of consciousness, especially through the application of mathematics in quantum mechanics and complexity theory. As a result one is compelled to wonder whether Platonic idealism - which itself grew out of the Greek philosophers' speculations about the nature of mathematics and its relationship to the phenomenal world - might be reformulated in contemporary terms as the founding concept of philosophy. Certainly, this view has been seriously considered by the physicist and natural philosopher, Paul Davies, (1992) the mathematician, Roger Penrose (1990, 1995) and the philosopher and novelist, Iris Murdoch. (1992)

For Davies the ultimate reality resides in the laws of physics, which give rise to the remarkable dynamic order, poised between stasis and chaos, that we see around and within us, and that mathematical analysis so beautifully encapsulates. In them he discerns, not the mind of a personal God, but nevertheless a purpose for the universe which includes the evolution of conscious beings who are able to comprehend such marvels. Penrose is convinced that the Platonic world of mathematical forms actually exists prior to the mathematicians' *discovery* (rather than construction) of such entities as the natural numbers and the algebra of complex numbers, and that this ideal world

influences the physical world in which we live.²⁴ Furthermore, he speculates that

Perhaps a Platonic reality should also be assigned to other abstract concepts, not just mathematical ones. Plato himself would have insisted that the ideal concept of 'the good' or 'the beautiful' must also be attributed a reality, just as mathematical concepts must. (Penrose, 1995: 416)

As indicated in Chapter 1, Iris Murdoch concurs with this view that the Platonic concept of the Good may be the ultimate reality. She argues that the long tradition of metaphysics (including also religious, mystical and intuitive forms of knowledge) remains *a guide* to morals,²⁵ and that there is still a place for common sense, empiricism, rationalism, pragmatism and structuralism (in which she also includes post-structuralism) in formulating an ethics.

The ideas of Cupitt, Zohar and Marshall, Davies, Penrose and Murdoch are ultimately speculative but by no means without foundation, as the carefully argued work of each of these scholars attests. The fact that they have seriously proposed a return to such well-worn philosophical concepts is an encouragement to reconsider the possibility of a place for metaphysics in our construction of a more realistic ethics for our times. After all, it is the tacit belief, or at least the hope, that there is an ultimate truth, or truths, somewhere beyond the range of language and mathematics, which sustains a continued faith in the value of the conversation of mankind on whatever level it is conducted, from the most perfunctory request to the most profound philosophical discussion. It is the existence of that final point of reference, the *logos* of Platonic idealism, which Derrida is sometimes supposed to have disproved. But this is a distortion of his philosophy. What he has posited is not the impossibility of the existence of the transcendent *logos*, but the impossibility of ever being able to pin it down, to refer to it directly in language. The same thing may be true of attempts in mathematical physics to create a theory of everything, in spite of Stephen Hawking's (1988) claim to be on the verge of uncovering the mind of God. Yet scientists continue to be motivated by the search for meaning and a first cause.

In a sense, all language (including, perhaps, mathematics) is poetry - even the most careful philosophical discussions can be shown to be webs of metaphor and metonymy. And poetry can only hint at both its subjects and objects, to approach them via circumlocutions, which in the end define an area

²⁴ A fascinating novelistic treatment of this and other ideas about the nature and significance of mathematics can be found in Sue Woolfe's (1996) *Leaning towards Infinity*.

²⁵ Perhaps when Murdoch entitled her book *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* she was deliberately being less ambitious than Kant set out to be in his great work, *The Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals*.

of silence where the rational mind must be still, and what can be known must be apprehended by some kind of (mystical?) intuition. Perhaps with the advent of post-structuralism and the deconstruction of all dualities, the day has arrived when the Western tradition of reason (the 'Church of Reason' Robert M. Pirsig, 1974, called it in that extraordinary cult book of the seventies, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*) having admitted its inherent limitations in the pursuit of truth, might also recognise that its own mystical tradition, the *via negativa* of the Christian mystics,²⁶ and the mysticism of the East, such as Zen Buddhism,²⁷ offer an essential complement. This may be a difficult pill to swallow for recalcitrant humanists who still put their faith in the sufficiency of reason.

Yet to deny, as some have accused post-structuralists of doing, the existence of an ultimate truth (call it God, the Buddha, the Tao, the One, or even the object of the totalising structure, if you like) or at least to deny the possibility of human language being able to even *approach* the truth, or truths, may leave the struggle to gain and communicate knowledge open to a final, terrible temptation. That is the temptation to abandon responsibility to any value beyond that of self-interest, and to give in to a desire for personal and self-serving power at the expense of the rights of others. Language (and the practice science) is something we 'do' in the first instance because it gets things done. But what we want to do is an indication of what we value. Having evolved the ability to reflect upon our values, do we now want to enjoy, in the company of all sentient beings and sharing our many different perspectives, what seems good and true and beautiful? Or do we want to bend all that to selfish, partisan ends? The shape of this temptation, and the consequences of sometimes giving in to it, can be clearly seen in the history of science from Francis Bacon to the present day. In part, the choice is made in how we view language and use it. On the one hand, we can describe ourselves as part of a greater whole, recognise our limitations of knowledge and power, stand in awe of the immanent and/or transcendent 'One', try by listening as much as by talking to live in harmony with it, and survive to tell the tale to our children and our children's children. Or, on the other hand, we can use the power of language to define ourselves as fundamentally separate from nature and from each other, and attempt to lord it over all that we regard as alien to ourselves - and may the best (i.e. the most powerful) person win, which might mean to destroy everything in the attempt. If this seems to be putting the ethical choices which face us every day in terms

²⁶ See Kevin Hart (1989) for a discussion of Derrida which argues that his philosophy is in fact a development of the tradition of negative theology.

²⁷ See, for example, Herrigel (1971) who gives an account, from his perspective as a German philosopher, of his experience of learning archery from a Japanese Zen master.

which are altogether too stark, it is worth considering that Western culture may well be faced with such a choice in the looming ecological crisis. As the realities of that crisis begin to force their way into our consciousness the choice will increasingly look like one between the survival or extinction of our species and, more immediately, of ourselves. If we wait long enough, therefore, our instinct for survival will make the 'choice' for us, but by then it may be too late.

In offering the above account of some attempts to use the languages of religion, the humanities, science and mathematics to express the inexpressible mystery of existence, to shape our future and to articulate the ethical choices which we must make in order to achieve our goals, I remind the reader that there also remains an important role for narratives. Just what that role entails will be illustrated in Chapter 3.

7. The ethics of 'disillusionment and re-enchantment': a modest synthesis

Much more could be said about other recent developments in ethics: for example extensive and significant work is being done in feminist ethics; there are also important responses being developed by moral philosophers to issues raised by the ecological crisis; and there is the work in applied ethics being undertaken by academic philosophers and others in many more areas of practical concern, such as biological and business ethics. All of these are topics which should be addressed in developing a comprehensive theory of ethics, and which could be relevant to discussions in English classrooms. However, there is only space to draw attention to them here and to encourage others to explore them further. This is one reason why the synthesis I am suggesting - some elements of which have been outlined above - must remain tentative and modest: it leaves out so much which still needs to be considered. Another reason for its incompleteness is that it is centred on the 'attractor'²⁸ of evolutionary theory - a theory which is itself still evolving. Moreover, the theory of evolution holds as *one* of its central tenets that what is selected from among many random mutations is what satisfies the pragmatic criteria of workability and survival rather than the logical criterion of coherence. Hence the perhaps overly-optimistic tone of the previous section on the return of metaphysics needs to be tempered by the more pragmatic and ambivalent approach of - to take just one example - Robert Wright whose work, as we have seen, clearly illustrates the difficulty of deriving a coherent ethics from the seemingly contradictory moral codes which human societies have evolved in response to the imperatives of their individual members' 'selfish' genes. One difficulty of combining a metaphysical basis for ethics with an evolutionary one, particularly if the metaphysical view includes the idea of the Good as the ultimate reality, lies in resolving the traditional problem which such a metaphysics has in explaining the existence of evil, a problem which does not exist in a purely evolutionary model (or at least in a fully deterministic one) where 'evil' is the suffering caused by the contingencies of existence, including those at work in the human psyche. Nevertheless, a startling new attempt to do this has been made by the mathematical physicist, Frank Tipler (1996) whose book, *The Physics of Immortality*, I have mentioned previously.

²⁸ I have borrowed this term from the language of chaos, or complexity, theory where it is sometimes used in the phrase 'strange attractor'. An attractor is defined by Peter Coveney and Roger Highfield (1995) as: 'A way to describe the long-term behaviour of a system. Equilibrium and steady states correspond to fixed point attractors, periodic states to limit-cycle attractors and chaotic states to strange attractors'. (424) A simple example of an attractor is the point of stasis towards which a pendulum seems to be drawn as the energy of its swing dissipates.

The final reason why any proposal for a new theory of ethics must be greeted with a degree of scepticism is that it is only a theory, a model, a construction, which must face Popperian tests of its falsifiability until it succumbs and is superseded by a better theory. It is the *necessity* of this procedural scepticism, occasioned as far as we can tell by the very conditions of our existence, that gives rise to the disillusionment which is one of the two key terms in my proposal for an evolutionary-postmodern-metaphysical ethics of *disillusionment and re-enchantment*. Disillusionment here is a crucial stage of the on-going process of creating models of perceived reality, testing them by means of both reason and experience, discovering in what ways they are merely illusions, and replacing them with new and hopefully more accurate models. Thus disillusionment becomes a positive value - rather like Derrida's view of deconstruction as an 'affirmation [which] goes through some radical questioning, but is not questioning in the final analysis' (quoted in Chapter 1: 5 above) - and it carries with it the obligation of a moral imperative if we wish to grow in our understanding of truth and in acting consistently with it. In its negative aspect of shattering treasured illusions, disillusionment may be experienced as creating a wasteland, a void, a sense of tragic loss or of an encounter with the absurd - depending upon how grand our illusions were and how firmly we believed in them in the first place. This experience, which has been evoked most poignantly in modernist texts like Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, may be accompanied by such emotions as sorrow, the feeling of having been betrayed, and despair. However, viewed in its positive aspect, disillusionment may also be experienced as clearing the ground in order to rebuild, an empty space pregnant with possibilities, a sense of comic relief, and it may be accompanied by such emotions as joy, renewed desire, and hope. Disillusionment, then, may be embraced as the pain and pleasure of growing towards whatever maturity is available to us. It can be, paradoxically, an affirmation of attachment to life. Re-enchantment, correspondingly, will then be what happens to our perspective of the universe as we embark upon this age-old, cyclical journey - of creation, destruction and re-creation; discovery, loss and rediscovery; enchantment, disenchantment and re-enchantment - fortified by the modest hopes which are appropriate to ignorant yet talented creatures facing the mystery of existence in a vast and complex universe.

Indeed, it may be that ethics can begin only where there is some hope and a sense of shared purpose - in the nexus between the moral sense of being for the Other and the instinct to survive in being for Oneself, the nexus out of which hope and shared purpose spring. These impulses, according to the sociobiologists, are the gift of life to its creatures, evolving from the first

unthinkable surge of the Big Bang and through the aeons of its long unwinding. Without such impulses the making of so many theories could scarcely have occurred - including post-structuralist philosophies, quantum mechanics, and Frank Tipler's (1996) ambitious or foolhardy attempt to be for postmodernity what Thomas Aquinas was for the middle ages. (328-329) Nor would there be any point to ethics' fundamental question: how should we live if we want to live together as best we can? In the next chapter I pursue some answers to that question through readings of some of the texts which constitute the wealth of literature that Martha Nussbaum (1990) sees as a form of moral philosophy. My deeper purpose there - as it has been here - is to restore hope in a larger sense of meaning and purpose than post-structuralist ideas alone can afford, and in the value of ethics itself, especially as it takes the form of literature and ethical literary criticism, in the pursuit of that hope. I also demonstrate in the next two chapters that, although morality and ethical reasoning have instinctual, genetic, deterministic origins, and although schooling has developed as a social mechanism for inculcating often unexamined moral values, it is still possible to some extent to transmit ethics as a mode of critical and creative 're-valuation' via carefully managed discussions in literacy and literature classes.

Part Two: Poiesia

Chapter 3

Literature and criticism as ethical reflection

1. Contemporary models of ethical criticism: introduction

An evolutionary epistemology would suggest that languages have developed because they have conferred adaptive advantages on those organisms which possess them. These advantages are hard to explain without postulating that languages are fairly successful in communicating intended meanings from one individual to another, and in referring with some accuracy to the textual, psychological, social and physical conditions within which those individuals live. Hence it should be possible to devise a hermeneutic method which takes into account the epistemological considerations of the previous chapters - including the various problems of textuality raised by post-structuralism - and which can offer greater accuracy in discerning intentions, influences and references. Whilst the detailed treatment of such a method is beyond the scope of this study, enough has been said to justify embarking on an experiment with ethical criticism which takes these considerations into account. One purpose of this kind of criticism, especially with students in schools, is to teach and practise the skills of ethical reasoning, since these skills are useful in negotiating everyday life with all its textual and other complexities. Students can apply ethical criticism skills in the interpretation and discussion of the more, or less, complex and accurate models of life which authors construct through the stories that they tell and that are told by their culture through them. To what extent, and why, these fictional models distort experience are questions which will form part of the discussions.

Before offering my own examples of ethical criticism, let me draw attention to three recent prototypes which have inspired me, but which also offer the reader alternative approaches, since they derive from somewhat different ethical theories than my fundamentally evolutionary one. Martha Nussbaum (1989) exemplifies theoretically informed ethical criticism of the highest order in discussing Henry James' exquisitely subtle expositions of interpersonal morality in his extraordinary late novels, *The Ambassadors*, *The Wings of a Dove*, and *The Golden Bowl*. Her example might be too difficult for senior secondary students to follow, but it is a very appropriate one for teachers, who may learn from it what ethical criticism can accomplish when practised by a

classicist and philosopher who is a leading exponent of Aristotelian, or virtues, ethics.

Another interesting example of contemporary ethical criticism has been provided by Jennifer Livett (1995) in an essay on the novels and stories of Elizabeth Jolley. Livett writes deftly from the perspective of the frequently uneasy conjunction of feminist and post-structuralist ethical positions. A quotation will serve to illustrate the tenor of her discussion. In writing about the literary critic hero of Jolley's (1988) novel, *The Sugar Mother*, Livett says:

Edwin at last begins to acknowledge that it is 'not possible to be simply like an animal, a bull servicing a cow' (146) and that he, who believed he was in control of this (patriarchal) story, has probably been all along entrapped in Mrs. Bott's (?also patriarchal) fiction. His situation is not only a result of interpretative incompetence, it also includes a willed misreading, another variant of reader-writer negotiations. But Leila, who speaks very little in the novel, and the baby, outside language altogether, though they appear to be enclosed in other people's stories, eventually have a power and immediacy which may control all the stories. (17)

Here Livett comments upon the complex way biological and discursive determinations impinge upon the life of a fictional character in the context of a narrative which appears to have been constructed with a feminist slant. Earlier Livett suggests that 'Jolley is demonstrating in all [her] fictions that experience of the world comes through a network of complete and incomplete stories. Since we live by analysing stories, life makes us all into critics of narrative, and moral judgements may in some sense be judgements like those in literary criticism'. (15) Taken out of context, this observation seems to make too simple a connection between reading and living: making moral judgements in reading is apparently a rehearsal for making them in life. This statement is probably true, but the earlier quotation from Livett's essay gives some indication of how aware she is that the connection between literary and life experiences is indeed extremely complex. She concludes her essay with some brief quotations from Jolley's (1979) story, 'The Performance', which illustrate the often perplexing and painful nature of making moral judgements: 'You seem to have two answers to every question... I have no answers' (3) 'Yes, it's terrible when there's two answers... I haven't any answers at all really, only questions. Only questions'. (28)

Of particular interest in the light of my discussion of the ethics of lying in *Heart of Darkness*, is Livett's as yet unpublished suggestion that in *The Newspaper of Claremont Street* Jolley (1981) reworks Immanuel Kant's famous example of the application of his categorical imperative against lying.²⁹ The

²⁹ I am grateful to Jennifer Livett for permission to use this idea and develop it in my own way here.

categorical imperative states: 'act only according to that maxim by which you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law'. (Trans. Beck, 1949: 80) Kant's practical and theoretical application of this maxim to lying appears in the following passage, which employs a rudimentary story in order to defend the duty to tell the truth as an absolute principle:

For instance, if by telling a lie you have prevented a murder, you have made yourself legally responsible for all the consequences; but if you have held rigorously to the truth, public justice can lay no hand on you, whatever the unforeseen consequences may be. After you have honestly answered the murderer's question as to whether his intended victim is at home, it may be that he has slipped out so that he does not come in the way of the murderer, and thus that the murder may not be committed. But if you had lied and said he was not at home when he had really gone out without your knowing it, and if the murderer had then met him as he went away and murdered him, you might justly be accused as the cause of his death. For if you had told the truth as far as you knew it, perhaps the murderer might have been apprehended by the neighbors while he searched the house and thus the deed might have been prevented. Therefore, whoever tells a lie, however well intentioned he might be, must answer for the consequences, however unforeseeable they were, and pay the penalty for them even in a civil tribunal. This is because truthfulness is a duty which must be regarded as the ground of all duties based on contract, and the laws of these duties would be rendered uncertain and useless if even the least exception to them were admitted.

To be truthful (honest) in all declarations, therefore, is a sacred and absolutely commanding decree of reason, limited by no expediency. (Trans. Beck, 1949: 349)

Part of Kant's point in this story is precisely that this is an unusual and extreme situation. Faced with the murderer's questions, 'you' are obliged to answer, or else place your own life in jeopardy. Furthermore, even if you had time to think through the possible consequences of your options - which under the circumstances you probably would not - you cannot be certain of the actual outcomes, because you do not know what contingencies may intervene in determining the results. For all these reasons it is best to act on an absolute principle - and even more so because the rightness of that principle (in this case that one must never lie) is the one thing you can be certain of, and because that rightness is guaranteed, Kant argues, by its rational derivation from the categorical imperative. However, if we can thus overrule the objection that the action which Kant advocates here is too calculating in its apparently self-serving prudential concerns, it still strikes us today as too cold in its principled rationality. What seems to be lacking is adherence to the humane virtues of friendship, love, loyalty and courage. We are inclined to see these as principles which sometimes conflict with, and usually override, the general virtue of telling the truth. Thus ethics seems to us to be shot through with irreconcilable dilemmas, the ultimate dilemma being that of finding oneself obliged to choose a course of action which apparently sacrifices one principle in order to satisfy

another equally commanding one. What counts as the highest moral conduct in this situation is the sort of politically expedient action which is strategically conceived to satisfy the most immediately demanding principle, whilst initiating further actions which may enable us to satisfy other principles in the long run. Such conduct is characterised in the sayings: 'The end justifies the means', and 'Politics is the art of the possible'. What this view has in common with Kant's is the role of principle in morality, but it does not pretend that moral principles can be derived from reason alone. In fact, just what such principles can be derived from remains a vexed question amongst contemporary moral philosophers, as Peter Singer (1994) makes clear in his extensive reader on ethics. One thing that is clear, though - particularly from the above quotation from Kant - is that stories and their interpretation have an important role to play in ethical deliberations.

In Jolley's story the character called 'the Newspaper', an elderly cleaning lady, has a younger brother whom she dotes upon, but who exploits her unconscionably. The last time she is summoned to him she finds him fallen on hard times and recovering from illness. He begs her to steal a hundred pounds so that he can leave Australia and go to South Africa. On her way home she is accosted by a well-dressed young man who claims to be a friend of her brother. He has lost track of her brother and says, with much charm, that he needs to find him in order to offer him a deal which will be greatly to his benefit. Newspaper is taken in, gives away her brother's whereabouts, and then realises, too late, that she has betrayed her brother to someone who wishes to take revenge upon him. Newspaper has in all innocence told the same kind of potentially damaging truth as that which in Kant's scenario can only be told knowingly. Yet for the rest of her life Newspaper feels guilty about it. Later in the story she abandons to death by exposure a lonely and demanding old woman - Nastasya or, as Newspaper calls her, 'Narsty' - whom she has been caring for, but finds extremely burdensome. Newspaper would like to be rid of Narsty, but does not plan to kill her. However, when the opportunity to abandon her to the elements suddenly presents itself, she does so, and apparently feels no guilt afterwards.

What morals, or ethical principles, if any, can be drawn from this tale? It is, of course, much more rich and complex in Jolley's telling than I have been able to indicate here, and it deserves more detailed discussion. However, in the context of this study a few observations immediately come to mind. Newspaper has no reason to love her brother apart from the fact that he is her younger sibling whom she has known since he was a sweet little baby. One suspects that she would have as readily lied to protect him, as she would have stolen for him. Sociobiology offers a simple explanation for this kind of familial love.

Newspaper has no other reason to care for the old woman except that, as Jolley has her suggest, she has been brought up to be helpful, and the old woman is an 'Other' human being who has laid claim to her help. Sociobiology explains - better than Bauman and Levinas do - this kind of attachment too. It also explains why familial attachments are stronger than merely human ones. Hence in the story a parallel is drawn between Newspaper's drowning of unwanted kittens and her abandoning of Nastasya, although she perseveres with the latter much longer than she does with the former. Where is Kant's categorical imperative in all this? Certainly many readers will be left feeling uneasy at the end of Jolley's somewhat eccentric and macabre novel. Is this because rationality compels belief in an absolute principle which condemns murder? Or is it simply that we recognise our common humanity in each of Newspaper's actions: we too would steal and lie, and even die for a brother, but we might be more tempted to put the fulfilment of our own dearest dream before the life of a particularly burdensome and elderly acquaintance, and most of us certainly would not sacrifice more than a little for a cat. The sociobiological explanation for these common human reactions describes them as strategies shaped by evolutionary forces in response to the principle of the survival of the fittest, or what Dawkins, (1976, 1986) with the insights of modern genetics, variously calls the principle of 'the selfish gene' and 'the blind watchmaker'. This principle has also been derived by rational processes, but on the basis of empirical observation and not by rationality alone. Yet Kant's purely rationalist approach to ethics is not entirely overruled by evolutionary theory, as we shall see.

In his brilliant example of theoretically aware ethical criticism, entitled *Morals and Stories*, Tobin Siebers (1992) flies in the face of many post-structuralists by defending Kant's adherence to absolute principle. This is an adherence which is not motivated by feelings, consequences of actions, or ulterior motives of any kind, except a special sort of respect for law itself which is dictated by reason alone. He does this by discussing in detail the context - Kant's debate with one of his critics - in which the above story of the murderer first appeared, and by showing what this story looks like when translated into the more modern context of Fascism. Siebers accomplishes the latter by analysing Jean-Paul Sartre's reworking of Kant's story in his tale of the Spanish civil war, 'The Wall', and then by discussing Hannah Arendt's use of Kant in her work on the experiences of Nazi war criminals, Jewish collaborators, and Germans who refused to co-operate with the Nazis. In his detailed and richly illuminating discussion, Siebers demonstrates that Kant's ethics is well able to cope with the challenges of modern totalitarianism, and that principles should not be accommodated to political (or strategic) expediency. He also shows that

principles - or 'morals' - are meaningless without stories which situate them in the world of human experience, and that the imagination, by means of which we construct stories, is essential to moral judgement and decision making. Imagination allows us to understand the moral dilemmas of others, to predict the consequences of our own moral choices and to consider how we might live with ourselves, as well as with our neighbours, if we do, or do not, adhere to commanding principles of conduct. Thus Siebers concludes:

The categorical imperative recommends that we ask whether our maxim may be treated as a universal law. It asks us to tell ourselves a story to determine whether an action is acceptable. To describe its structure in a modern light, as Arendt does, it asks finally whether I can live with myself, if I act in a certain way.³⁰ Despite his association with duty, Kant holds up individuality as the guide to moral conduct, and it is this emphasis that makes his ideas so valuable to Arendt's attempts to combat those regimes that exist to extinguish individuals and their moral faculties.

I am not arguing that Kant's ethics is flawless. Nor that he provides the final answer to living a moral life in the modern world. *I am arguing that he exposes the limits of an ethics based wholly on experience, imitation, and political norms.* In Nazi Germany, one could not depend on either political convention or the conduct of others to guide oneself in matters ethical. To be moral was a crime from the point of view of one's neighbours. (152. My emphasis.)

In the following discussion of *Heart of Darkness* I will return to Siebers' provocative view of Kant's categorical imperative, with its implications for the ethics of lying, and for the role of stories in moral and ethical development. In concluding this section, however, we may observe that Siebers has effectively revived the meta-ethical dilemma of whether conduct can and should be guided by principle alone, or by principle modified by practice. The reader may recall (p. 88 above) that Geoffrey Harpham (1992) resolved this dilemma by articulating his version of a categorical principle as, 'Act on principle', and 'laminating' this with the practice of acting on the contingent moral codes of one's culture. This is certainly neat, but, as he recognised, it offers little help when codes and cultures collide. All it can do is alert us to the human wisdom enshrined in morality and ethics, which at least might be greater than our own. And, as Harpham also demonstrates, one of the best places to find that wisdom applied in practice is in the models which literature provides.

³⁰ In this light it is interesting to note that Newspaper in Jolley's novel is unable to forgive herself for unwittingly betraying her brother, but seems able to live with the fact that she abandoned Nastasya to die. However, at the end of the story she does seem a little reluctant to draw close to another human being, suggesting that she feels a twinge of something like remorse - perhaps a revival of that sometimes painful feeling that all other humans have a moral claim upon us which intrudes upon our self-centredness.

2. *Heart of Darkness* and the ethics of lying: disillusionment

Joseph Conrad's novella, *Heart of Darkness*, has been discussed by literary critics from a multitude of different perspectives, including those which explore its moral assumptions and its ethical questioning. One strand of these discussions, which is most relevant to my concerns, pursues Ian Watt's (1979) observation that Conrad belonged to 'the first generation that had not felt supported by the traditional view of man's flattering eminence in the history as well as the design, of the cosmos'. (154) In his book, *Joseph Conrad's Darwinian Ethics*, Allan Hunter (1983) has examined in detail the effects on Conrad's philosophy of life of the revolution in scientific and religious thought occasioned by Charles Darwin. Hunter argues that, whereas Darwin's great defender, Thomas Huxley, saw the implications of evolutionary theory for ethics in rather optimistic terms, Conrad took a more pessimistic line. Richard Yatzeck (1996) concurs in depicting Conrad as adopting a gloomy view of the destiny of man and his pretensions to moral reform. He argues that Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* and Kelvin's second law of thermodynamics suggested to Conrad that man is just another of the animals in a world devoid of 'special creation', itself doomed to ultimate destruction by entropy. In support of this view Yatzeck quotes Conrad's comments in an 1897 letter to R.B. Cunninghame Graham:

The fate of a humanity condemned ultimately to perish from cold is not worth troubling about. If you take it to heart it becomes an unendurable tragedy. If you believe in improvement you must weep, for the attained perfection must end in cold, darkness and silence. In a dispassionate view the ardour for reform, improvement for virtue, for knowledge, and even for beauty is only a vague sticking up for appearances... There is a - let us say - a machine. It evolved itself (I am severely scientific) out of a chaos of scraps of iron and behold! - it knits. I am horrified at the horrible work and stand appalled. I feel it ought to embroider - but it goes on knitting. You come and say: 'this is all right; it's only a question of the right kind of oil. Let us use this - for instance - celestial oil and the machine shall embroider a most beautiful design in purple and gold.' Will it? Alas no. You cannot by any special lubrication make embroidery with a knitting machine. And the most withering thought is that the infamous thing has made itself; made itself without thought, without conscience, without foresight, without eyes, without heart. It is a tragic accident - and it has happened... In virtue of that truth one and immortal which lurks in the force that made it spring into existence it is what it is - and it is indestructible. It knits us in and it knits us out. It has knitted time, space, pain, death, corruption, despair and all the illusions - and nothing matters. I'll admit however that to look at the remorseless process is sometimes amusing. (Conrad 1969: 65)

The image of the cosmic knitting machine foreshadows Conrad's depiction of the two women knitting relentlessly in the foyer of the colonial office in *Heart of Darkness*, (Conrad, 1990: 145, 147)³¹ It supports the view

³¹ All references to the text are taken from the 1990 Oxford University Press World's Classics edition.

that this novella, which was published just two years after the letter to Cunninghame Graham and which contains a scathing indictment of the hypocrisy of European colonialism,³² is indeed a deeply pessimistic portrayal of the whole human condition. In fact it can be seen as a paradigm record of a personal episode of 'disillusionment' coinciding with a historical moment of cultural disillusionment with profound effect. In this case we see Conrad's early modernist disillusionment, but a similar moment can be found in Woolf, Forster, Eliot and Pound, and in America in F. Scott Fitzgerald and Hemingway.

The flashes of light among *Heart of Darkness's* prevailing images of deepening gloom are associated with a mere handful of items, which are typically humanist in their reduction to a reliance on a much attenuated version of the hero tradition: the character of the central narrator of the story, Captain Marlow; his vision of the brief span of our individual human lives; his belief in the (comparative) virtues of the British Empire, which nevertheless is doomed, like everything else in the universe, to ultimate decay; the moral values of honest labour and the restraint of human lusts; and a beautiful, grief-stricken woman who is idealistic and faithful, but also tragically deluded. Beyond these things Marlow sees only our obliteration at the hands of an ultimately hostile universe (see, for example, 166, 183, 184): there is for him no after-life, no meting-out of divine justice, no heavenly bliss - all that is good, true and beautiful must be grasped in this life or not at all. Marlow's is a thoroughly materialist view of reality and at the same time a deeply moral one. Indeed, here we see Conrad as an early modernist still struggling to make this difficult conjunction, whereas by late modernism morality has vanished into aesthetics. However, Marlow's belief in the possibilities for human goodness seems to be far outweighed in his tale by examples of corruption. It is for these reasons that I consider *Heart of Darkness* to be a profoundly pessimistic tale, and that I want to ask: is this a suitable fiction with which to engage in the moral and ethical development of adolescent readers? Would it give them hope and sufficient reason to want to be moral, or would it merely inform them of some difficult ethical issues and leave them pessimistic about the possibility of their resolution? Would it therefore disillusion without re-enchanting them - and if so, would that still justify its inclusion in English courses as part of a cross-curricular program of ethics education in schools and universities? In addressing these questions I hope to illustrate how an ethical criticism founded on the ideas outlined in the previous chapter can provide some adequate answers.

³² Conrad's criticism of colonialism in this novella is remarkable for its time, in spite of the fact that, as Chinua Achebe (1989) has famously shown, it also partakes of many of the racist assumptions of its day.

Conrad has Marlow convey his vision of life not to women or children, but rather (in the manner of the ancient Greek philosophers perhaps) to a small group of mature, responsible, worldly-wise *male* friends. It is interesting that they are identified in the novella not by their names but by their professions, reminding the reader of their standing in civilised society and their role in upholding its values. Marlow relates to these men his grim and often sardonic tale of an encounter with Mr Kurtz, who in his view was the most brilliant and potentially good, but finally the most corrupted, of human beings.³³ If in fact Conrad gives this narrator any moral motive at all in telling his story, presumably Marlow feels that these men will not be unduly harmed by it, and indeed will benefit from the experience. It seems, therefore, that Conrad's implied reader is a late 19th century middle class gentleman just like the men on the boat. A consequence of this is that a great deal of background material will need to be supplied by the late 20th century teacher, if her students are to understand, and enter into dialogue with, the community of shared belief which the men represent. However, Conrad has his unnamed narrator record some disagreements between Marlow and his listeners which might have the effect of encouraging the reader to adopt a more critical stance.

As the novella progresses Marlow tells his companions that in the end he was unable to reveal to Kurtz's bereaved fiancée the full horror of this encounter. Confronted by her complete faith in the exceptional goodness of the man whom she idolises as the paragon of civilisation, and in response to her desperate request, Marlow tells her that the last word Kurtz pronounced was her name. But, of course, he is acutely aware that Kurtz's last words had really been an anguished, perhaps despairing, whisper: 'The horror! The horror!' (239) Thus Marlow is guilty of telling an outright lie, even though he has previously informed his friends that he hates lies:

I would not have gone so far as to fight for Kurtz, but I went for him near enough to a lie. You know I hate, detest, and can't bear a lie, not because I am straighter than the rest of us, but simply because it appals me. There is a taint of death, a flavour of mortality in lies - which is what I hate and detest in the world - what I want to forget. It makes me miserable and sick, like biting something rotten would do. Temperament, I suppose. (172)

Marlow here reflects on his own horror at the notion that the world may be rotten at the core and therefore itself a kind of lie. He attributes his hatred of lies to their 'flavour of mortality', declaring that he feels this way not because he is a

³³ Conrad's treatment of the character of Kurtz is a case of the most-developed individual of the highest species having the greatest potential for both good and evil. Mediocre minds do not have the imaginative power to be fully evil. This is a version of Christian humanist modernity which begins with Renaissance science, politics and aesthetics as can be seen for example in Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, Machiavelli's *The Prince* and the character of Edmund in *King Lear*.

man of exceptionally strong principle, a kind of moral saint, but because of his temperament, perhaps a certain squeamishness. This may strike the reader as a modest self-assessment, but it also means that Marlow cannot be seen as a Kantian when it comes to lying. He then recalls an occasion when he had told an indirect lie for Kurtz's sake:

Well, I went near enough to it by letting the young fool there believe anything he liked to imagine as to my influence in Europe. I became in an instant as much of a pretence as the rest of the bewitched pilgrims. (172)

He excuses himself by claiming that he 'had a notion it somehow would be of help to that Kurtz whom at the time I did not see'. (172) Thus he reveals himself to be an ethical consequentialist. Later he lies directly, if unpremeditatedly, for the sake of Kurtz's fiancée. To his great discomfort, he finds that he cannot bear to disillusion a woman who is sustained by such a radiant, if deluded, faith.

I heard a light sigh and then my heart stood still, stopped dead short by an exulting and terrible cry, by the cry of inconceivable triumph and of unspeakable pain. 'I knew it - I was sure!' ... She knew. She was sure. I heard her weeping; she had hidden her face in her hands. It seemed that the heavens would fall upon my head. But nothing happened. The heavens do not fall for such a trifle. Would they have fallen I wonder, if I had rendered Kurtz that justice which was his due? Hadn't he said he wanted only justice? But I couldn't. I could not tell her. It would have been too dark - too dark altogether... (252)

Kurtz's desire for justice mentioned here is perhaps another example of the use of one of Bernard Williams' 'thin', more principled ethical concepts, as opposed to the 'thick', practical version of ethics which Marlow seems to offer. In these extreme circumstances such a lie is certainly understandable. Marlow himself describes it as a 'trifle'. Indeed, who would not be moved to prevaricate in order to spare the feelings of anyone so profoundly stricken with grief? But is such a lie justifiable? Marlow is portrayed as being very uneasy about it. He hates lies and, furthermore, he feels that he has been untrue to Kurtz in order to care for Kurtz's Intended. At least these feelings make him seem more human in his uncertainty.

Immanuel Kant, as we have seen, argued that one should never under any circumstances tell a lie, even if it seemed that by lying one could save the life of a friend. However, Rae Langton (1994) tells a true story about a poignant correspondence which took place from 1791 to 1794 between Kant and Maria von Herbert, in which Kant's categorical imperative - or at least his failure to persevere compassionately in trying to advise her - proved to be of no comfort at all to the lady, who was so distressed that she was contemplating suicide. Herbert's moral anguish and emotional depression were the direct result of

having told a painful truth about herself to a man with whom she shared both friendship and love. The truth was that she had had a previous relationship with a man who had abused her. By reluctantly revealing this to her new beloved she had both lost his love and diminished their profound friendship - a result which is a sad reflection on the sexual values of their society. Langton shows that Kant failed by his own principles to help Herbert, and argues - also, up to a point, by Kant's own principles - that Herbert may have had a *duty* to lie. Under the circumstances of the time, when a woman's worth was measured in large part by her virginity, such a lie could be regarded as a strategic act which might secure as its ends the great goods of both friendship and self-respect, whilst denying the great good of truthfulness. Langton comments:

Kant would not allow it. He thinks we should act as if the Kingdom of Ends is with us now. He thinks we should rely on God to make it all right in the end. But God will not make it all right in the end. And the Kingdom of Ends is not with us now. Perhaps we should do what we can to bring it about. (294)

The conclusion of Langton's story is that in 1803 Maria von Herbert committed suicide. Langton points out that this was an act of which Kant's philosophy did not approve, although he recognised that it required a courage which deserves our respect as having moral worth in itself. Is this, then, a case in which it is right to lie as a strategic or political means to securing a personal, and perhaps ultimately social, good? Does this story undo Kant's argument, and Siebers' defence of it, that absolute ethical principles are essential to the maintenance of a moral life? Marlow's somewhat similar situation may constitute another case, and so I will defer any attempt to answer these questions until we have considered it further.

For Marlow, too, the world is without God. The heavens³⁴ do not fall for such a trifle as he regards his lie to have been. Furthermore, Marlow's apparent concern for the Intended's feelings could perhaps be read as showing that he treats her as an end in herself and not as a means to some other end, such as that of maintaining his own integrity. However, it could also be read as treating her as a means by which Marlow can uphold, against the evidence of Kurtz to the contrary, his belief that at least some people can maintain civilised values in a dark and savage world. And he could be doing this in a way which is patronising to *all* women, by treating them as 'things' necessary to the maintenance of a civilised world, particularly one in which men can sit comfortably smoking on the deck of a ship whilst contemplating the vicissitudes of existence. Thus Marlow's lie raises further questions, which relate directly to

³⁴ I take 'heavens' here to mean merely the imaginative and material fabric of human ideals, since Marlow does not seem to believe in the existence of God even outside the world.

the inherently patronising business of the moral and ethical education of our children through literary studies. Are there at least some people who in some circumstances should be protected from stories which convey a deeply pessimistic view of life? Would 'the heavens fall' if they were told a lie, or indeed the truth? And if so, why?³⁵ That Conrad's novella directly addresses these questions becomes apparent when we examine the story more closely.

Marlow is not presented as a misogynist, but as still having a somewhat patronising view of women: on the one hand he admires them for the strength of their devotion, while on the other he laughs at them for the impracticality of their ideals. We are given the impression of a man who has spent his life working in the exclusively male world of shipping, and who considers it ironic that he, of all people, should have had to appeal to a woman for assistance in securing a job. (143) Speaking of the Aunt who had helped him to obtain a position as a steamboat captain with the Belgian Congo Company, Marlow says,

She talked about 'weaning those ignorant millions from their horrid ways,' till, upon my word, she made me quite uncomfortable. I ventured to hint that the Company was run for a profit.

'You forget, dear Charlie, that the labourer is worthy of his hire,' she said, brightly. It's queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own, and there had [sic] never been anything like it, and never can be. It is too beautiful altogether, and if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before the first sunset. Some confounded fact we men have been living contentedly with ever since the day of creation would start up and knock the whole thing over. (149)

The feminine here is clearly associated with beautiful illusions and impractical ideas, whilst the masculine is associated with the practical acceptance of harsh reality. The Aunt's use of the words 'horrid ways', 'profit' and the biblical reference to the labourer introduce the whole late-Victorian linking of capitalism, colonial patronage, and Christian manners and morals.

Later we are told that Marlow, in commenting on his memory of the whole episode concerning Kurtz and his fiancée, remarked:

'I laid the ghost of his gifts at last with a lie,' he began, suddenly. 'Girl! What? Did I mention a girl? Oh, she is out of it - completely. They - the women I mean - are out of it - and should be out of it. We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest ours gets worse.' (205)

It seems that Marlow would be inclined to lie to all women about the harsh realities of life, in order to protect not only their deluded sensibilities but also

³⁵ Another important question which arises here is whether or not fiction is a kind of lie and, if it is, can it be of any use in teaching morals and ethics? My view, which I expound further in discussing *Breaktime* and 'Morpho Eugenia', is that fiction is often used as a deliberate attempt not to deceive, but on the contrary to tell the truth about the world as the author understands it by means of a prototype or analogy or model.

the very fabric of *his* civilised society, which depends on the maintenance of such binary oppositions as male-female, public-private, work-prayer, civilisation-nature, reason-emotion and practicality-idealism. To him a lie of this kind might be justified as a means to a greater end. The very fact that Marlow's action is discussed so extensively in the text as a lie which is both justified and unjustified suggests that Conrad was aware of such ambiguity. Marlow is shown as telling the lie to the Intended, but in such a narrative form that doing so becomes problematical. Thus the text seems to give one impression with the content and another with the form. Can we, therefore, conclude that Conrad himself thought women should be protected in this way to preserve the fragile achievements of human - especially male - progress?³⁶ Perhaps he did, since he lived in a very sexist era. But then again perhaps not, since he chose to publish Marlow's lie, and his depressing vision of life, in a magazine which educated women were at liberty to read.³⁷ Of course, in our society which has experienced the enfranchisement of women and other achievements of the feminist movement, Marlow's attitude to women would not be countenanced. However, the Australian government still believes in protecting the young from reading and viewing material which might be too emotionally and morally disturbing - in fact it goes so far as to censor some material which it thinks might offend or corrupt adults as well as children. Moreover, it is hard to imagine a society which would not want to censor something in the name of its own preservation and the welfare of certain of its members.

Heart of Darkness offers its readers strong grounds for supposing that Marlow's attitude to Kurtz's fiancée as a woman should not be adopted as the norm, and indeed should not in the final analysis be taken literally. The presentation of the men and women in the novel, while somewhat melodramatic for the sake of hyperbole, may be taken as an attempt to be socially and psychologically realistic in the context of the time; but it also seems to be deliberately symbolic. For example Marlow is represented as, among other things, a version of the Buddha. (136, 140, 252) The two women who act as receptionists in the foyer of the colonial company's head office in Brussels are represented as the Fates of Greek legend, who spin the threads of each man's life ready to be cut off by the shears of Atropos. (145, 147) And Kurtz's magnificent

³⁶ I am conscious that I may appear oblivious here to the intentional fallacy and to Barthes' notion of the death of the author. I agree that, since authors cannot be fully in control of their texts and since language is itself a somewhat blurry medium, it is impossible for readers ever to know fully what an author intended or to agree on one completely determinate reading of a text. However, I have argued that a radically sceptical view of the communicative capacity of language is unjustified.

³⁷ The first appearance of *Heart of Darkness* occurred in the issues of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* for February, March and April 1899.

black mistress, gorgeously decorated with glinting yellow brass wire and other trinkets, is represented as 'the image of [the] tenebrous and passionate soul' of 'the immense wilderness' of Africa, 'the colossal body of the fecund and mysterious life'. (225, 226, 236) Conrad draws a striking comparison and contrast between this radiantly dark woman, in whom he symbolises the primitive life force, and Kurtz's glimmering gold 'Intended', who symbolises for him the still potent, but desperately vulnerable, aspirations of civilisation - aspirations which are the product of that same primitive life force. (246-252) Today post-colonial feminists would, of course, object to the way this use of symbolism appropriates the complex reality of the black woman as a simplified metaphor for Western notions of the exotic other. This is a clear example of what Edward Said (1978) has called 'Orientalism', and of turning the subject (in grammatical terms) into an object. In the context of the values of the novella, however, the ultimate effect of this symbolism is to propose something even more pessimistic about the nature of civilisation in its foundation, construction and preservation, yet at the same time to offer a tiny ray of hope to the reader. This ironic impression is given particular force in Marlow's description of Kurtz's painting of a very different kind of woman, this time representing the principle of (Western) justice, but in deeply ambiguous terms: 'draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch. The background was sombre - almost black. The movement of the woman was stately, and the effect of the torch-light on the face was sinister'. (169)

A large and ironic part of the 'truth' (i.e. Conrad's model of the way of the world) which is presented in *Heart of Darkness* is that civilisation is simply not possible without a strong commitment to the kind of blindly impractical idealism which is represented by Kurtz's 'Intended' - the woman who shares and has come to symbolise his noblest intentions. However, this idealism is also vulnerable to the corruption that overtakes even such a high-minded individual as Marlow believed Kurtz to have been. It is the possibility of this corruption and its consequent disillusionment to the point of despair from which Marlow wants to protect both Kurtz's fiancée and the civilised values which she represents. However, Conrad does not portray civilisation as an unequivocal good absolutely opposed to the evil savagery of tribal peoples. Rather civilisation is made out to be simply the product of human progress from tribal beginnings, a process which is attended by good and evil at every stage. For Conrad, civilisation represents real progress, at least in material terms, but there can nevertheless be more or less savage civilisations: for example British imperialism is portrayed in the novella as relatively good, (137, 140, 145) and Belgian imperialism as almost entirely vicious. Thus he thinks civilisation's

ideals of material and moral progress are always vulnerable to corruption - and the higher it rises, as the example of Mr Kurtz reveals, the greater will be its fall. Conrad's tale suggests that this is so for the simple reason that civilisation is constructed over an abyss, by beings who are commonly thought to be the product of the random processes of Darwinian evolution at work in a universe without purpose. Moreover, in this view there is nothing, apart from the ultimately impermanent and hostile material of the universe, from which to construct it. There is certainly no eternal deity who lays down a moral law upon which to found society: after all, Conrad was writing for a society which was still struggling with the loss of the sense of the Kantian sublime, and with its replacement by intimations of a fearful hollowness.

Whatever moral foundation exists to raise us above savagery is presented by Conrad as merely an inexplicable human capacity for restraint of our otherwise untrammelled lusts - inexplicable, that is, except that Marlow also associates it with fear and faith. (206, 235) Perhaps this capacity is a rudimentary and negative form of that altruism which, as we have seen, has now been satisfactorily explained by sociobiology as an unconscious, evolved strategy for achieving the survival of one's genes, but which Zygmunt Baumann, ignoring scientific in favour of philosophical explanations, calls the unfounded foundation of morality. In any case, this moral restraint is represented most strongly, if inaccurately, in the novella by the so-called 'cannibals' who man Marlow's boat but do not rebel and eat him to satisfy their obvious hunger.³⁸ It seems to be almost entirely absent from the so-called 'civilised' colonials who are his passengers, (194, 195, 206) and certainly all restraint has been abandoned by Kurtz (209) who, Conrad is careful to point out, symbolises the whole of European (including English) civilisation and not just the infamous excesses of Belgian colonialism. (207) Commenting upon the shrunken heads arrayed on stakes around Kurtz's house, Marlow says,

They only showed that Mr. Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts, that there was something wanting in him - some small matter which, when the pressing need arose, could not be found under his magnificent

³⁸ Marlow, and probably Conrad, would have been ignorant of what anthropology now tells us about cannibalism. It seems that the regular practice of anthropophagy among tribal people is not motivated by hunger, but has complex religious and moral determinants: some members of cannibal tribes will eat certain enemies to ingest their strength, or dead relatives as a sign of spiritual continuance. So what Marlow interprets as restraint of a basic biological urge (i.e. hunger) is in fact based on an acculturated ethics. An interesting fictional/documentary treatment of cannibalism appears in Gary Crew's (1990) adolescent novel, *Strange Objects*, which deals with the infamous massacre of the survivors of the wreck of the *Batavia*. A purely documentary treatment of the resort to anthropophagy to avoid starvation by so-called civilised people occurs in Piers Paul Read's (1975) *Alive*, which tells the story of the Andes plane crash survivors and of their horror of eating the flesh of friends and relatives. Both of these books are frequently studied in schools.

eloquence. Whether he knew of this deficiency himself I can't say. I think the knowledge came to him at last - only at the very last. (221)

Kurtz, isolated in the heart of Africa, is deluded by his own rhetoric. Here, perhaps, we can see a prefiguring of what I would call the poststructuralist caricature of language as a 'prison house' because of its alleged inability to refer to the real world or to provide determinate moral directions. However, Marlow's point seems to be that Kurtz finds his rhetoric deluding not simply because it is rhetorical, but because he is alone, cut off from dialogue with other members of his own culture who can 'correct' his culturally transgressive ideas. While Marlow shows an awareness of the (less than completely crippling) inadequacies of language, he is more concerned here with Kurtz's lack of the moral support which his own society would normally supply (partly through language as a social activity), and which Marlow describes to his listeners thus:

You can't understand. How could you? - with solid pavement under your feet, surrounded by kind neighbours ready to cheer you or to fall on you, stepping delicately between the butcher and the policeman, in the holy terror of scandal and gallows and lunatic asylums - how can you imagine what particular region of the first ages a man's untrammelled feet may take him into by the way of solitude - utter solitude without a policeman - by the way of silence - utter silence, where no warning voice of a kind neighbour can be heard whispering of public opinion? These little things make all the great difference. When they are gone you must fall back upon your own innate strength, upon your own capacity for faithfulness. (206)

No warning voice... These little things make all the great difference. One could add to Marlow's list of 'little things', which are set up by society to prevent Foucauldian-style transgression, the kind of Arnoldian public education which his gentlemanly listeners would have received in order to train them for the administration and service of the Empire. It is not surprising that, according to Marlow, these commonplace social sanctions, founded on an innate but fragile capacity for moral restraint and expressed in the discourses of the moral community, should require the support of some illusory ideals. For often it is faith, an irrational religious belief in a great and glorious destiny for mankind and in absolute principles of morality, which inspires the citizens to devote themselves to the small and large works by which civilisations are constructed and preserved. (207) Nor is it surprising that Marlow considers it necessary to hide this depressing state of affairs from all but the strongest minds. Thus *Heart of Darkness* seems to suggest that civilisation must be built upon a lie.³⁹

³⁹ Clearly I am not convinced that civilization, with its languages and other social practices, is ultimately founded upon a lie. For example sociobiology suggests that moral values are an evolutionary response to the very real circumstances of life. I am tempted to read Kurtz's delusion by his own 'magnificent eloquence', cut off from dialogue with anyone who might disagree with him, as a warning to poststructuralist (and other) fundamentalists who speak the

Why then would Conrad want to draw attention to this fact, whose revelation is potentially ruinous, by raising the 'ghost' of Kurtz to public view through the publication of his novella? Surely, if growing numbers of people were to fall prey to Kurtz's horrified disillusionment, then society would crumble, and the Hobbesian vision of the state of nature would reassert itself. Is it not therefore the writer's civic duty - or, to put it brutally, a political means to a pragmatic end - to uphold the lie? However, Conrad was merely presenting, in its most uncompromising terms, the picture of an absurd and hostile universe which many of his readers would have already sensed, especially since Darwin had hesitantly lent it greater credibility through the publication of his painstaking works on the evolution of species and the descent of man. It is true that many people since Darwin's day (including Darwin himself, and Darwin's defender, Thomas Huxley, as Robert Wright, 1995, has shown) have striven to avoid this pessimistic implication of his theories. Christian fundamentalists, exponents of so-called 'creation science', recognise in the theory of evolution a direct threat to morality founded on belief in God, and so flatly reject evolution as biblical and scientific heresy. The Roman Catholic church, however, has sought a compromise by teaching a doctrine of divinely guided evolution. Some atheists console themselves with various forms of belief in the evolution of man towards the emergence of a super-consciousness, a process in which they believe they can actively participate, and so find meaning and purpose in their lives. Francis Heylighen's vision of a post-biological future for mankind (mentioned in Chapter 2) seems to be of this kind. Certainly Frank Tipler and Zohar and Marshall find cause for extreme optimism in their more 'spiritual' versions of evolutionism. But what if the less optimistic model of the universe, depicted in *Heart of Darkness*, as I have so far represented it, and elaborated in later modernist literature, proves more accurate? How then could one find the moral restraint, the sense of purpose, the hope on which to found a civil society?

That Conrad's vision is both totally pessimistic and thoroughly accurate might seem to be supported by his apparent prescience, for he could be seen as foreshadowing the unravelling of the social fabric of some Western cities and nation states in recent times. Furthermore, he could be seen as pre-empting the more extreme and nihilistic elements of post-structuralist literary theory through Marlow's occasional recognition of the inability of language to refer determinately to individual experience, let alone to the world outside. (138, 163, 172)⁴⁰ However, these are unjustified conclusions: Conrad's vision is not

jargon of their coterie and isolate themselves from dialogue with other discourses - for example those of sociobiology and evolutionary ethics.

⁴⁰ Evidence that Conrad himself held this view of the inadequacy of language can be found in the above quoted (1897) letter to R.B. Cunningham-Graham on entropy: 'Half the words we use

unremittingly pessimistic; civil societies are not so vulnerable to collapse under normal circumstances; and language is not completely powerless to refer to realities beyond itself, as the critical history of *Heart of Darkness* itself indicates. This slightly more optimistic view of the world of the novella turns upon a close reading of the character of Marlow, who shows by his own words and example how it is possible for human beings to survive in a generally absurd and hostile universe and, indeed, to build flourishing civilisations, at least for a time. For although Marlow is acutely aware that he is surrounded by a void, he demonstrates that at least he is not 'hollow at the core'.

Marlow does not believe that a mere mortal can be expected to live alone with the knowledge that civilisation is constructed over an abyss. Certainly, in spite of his grandiose idealism, Kurtz proves that he cannot. Indeed, it seems that it is precisely because of the instability of his combination of Enlightenment and Romantic utopianism when confronted by what appears to him savage and alien that Kurtz's humanist subjectivity is so dramatically fragmented and his high-minded principles are replaced by the practices of terrorism and thoughts of genocide. Marlow, who is much less idealistic and therefore less vulnerable to disillusionment, despair and corruption, is depicted as sharing his knowledge with four experienced and reliable male friends - at times, however, almost compulsively, as if his tale were more the troubled confessions of a doubter and sinner than the parable of a moral teacher. For the most part, though, Marlow is portrayed by the unnamed narrator of the novella as an extremely self-possessed man who is at once humble and didactic, and ever ready to enter into dialogue about ethics with his companions. Indeed, as mentioned above, Marlow is presented as 'a Buddha preaching in European clothes' to his disciples. (140) What he preaches is perhaps a very Westernised version of Buddhism, an atheistic and ascetic devotion to salvation by practical works, which might appear to have more in common with the Protestant work ethic:

What saves us [i.e. British merchant seamen] is efficiency - the devotion to efficiency. (140; c.f. also 175, 183-184, 186-187)

It could be argued that what Conrad offers his readers is a smug celebration of Arnoldian middle-class values such as courage, hard work, efficiency, excellence and self-actualisation, and an invitation to feel morally superior to the exploitative colonial administration of the Belgians. But middle-class values represent a Christian ethic based on the notion of the dignity of man as the pinnacle of God's creation. Conrad is more radical than that: he depicts a

have no meaning whatever and of the other half each man understands each word after the fashion of his own folly and conceit. Faith is a myth and beliefs shift like mists on the shore...' (Conrad 1969: 65)

morality founded on fragile human qualities in spite of his atheistic materialism which sees the universe as fundamentally hostile.

In Marlow Conrad exemplifies the ethic of an emotional and rational human animal - it is modest, pragmatic, deliberate, determined and self-satisfying. It is also the ethic of a social animal, since sheer survival requires Marlow to work with others, such as the native fireman whom he relies on, respects and cares for, (187, 188) and then to communicate his ethical successes and failures to his peers. Furthermore, it inspires Marlow to judge the deluded Kurtz with a compassionate heart, for he wants to believe that Kurtz's last anguished words reveal that he still possesses an acute moral sense:

It was an affirmation, a moral victory paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions. But it was a victory! That is why I have remained loyal to Kurtz to the last, and even beyond, when a long time after I heard once more, not his own voice, but the echo of his magnificent eloquence thrown to me from a soul as translucently pure as a cliff of crystal. (241, 242)

And so Marlow also deals compassionately with Kurtz's grieving fiancée by telling her a lie which may be construed as a strategically consoling fiction - revealing that he can exercise a fine sense of restraint in this extremity too. The ethic which Marlow has developed through long experience and reflection on the basis of his innate moral sense is, of course, the ethic which Conrad admired in the common seamen among whom he had chosen to work for nearly twenty years.⁴¹ Finally, it is an ethic of healthy disillusionment, since the novella warns its readers of the ironic and tragic dangers of becoming carried away with the unrealistic ideals which Marlow says are still necessary to some, if not most, people in sustaining a civil society. Thus Conrad seems determined to avoid patronising his readers, since he does not offer them a lie as a consoling fiction in Marlow's tale. Rather, he vigorously disabuses them of any arrogant colonial pretensions, any moral superiority, any grandiose schemes to transform the world, which they might share with Mr Kurtz.

It would seem, therefore, according to *Heart of Darkness*, that an innate sense of restraint must be a sufficient moral foundation upon which to build an individual life and a civil society, in the face of the ever-looming darkness. It is this moral sense which must sustain Marlow and his companions, at the end of the novella, if they choose to continue their voyage in spite of the fact that

The offing was barred by a black bank of clouds, and the tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth flowed sombre under an overcast sky - seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness. (252)

⁴¹ See Cedric Watts' introduction to the World's Classics edition of *Heart of Darkness*: xxviii.

Yet at the same time Conrad seems to be suggesting, pragmatically, that if civilisations are to be built and sustained, then illusory ideals, high-minded but ultimately unfounded principles, are both necessary and extremely risky means to that end. Here, then, we see a picture of an uneasy coalition of principle and practice, in which practice must be the final arbiter since principle is in fact a sham.

Heart of Darkness presents a tough, possibly realistic and 'thick' view of life - that is if one accepts its element of melodrama as, in the Aristotelian sense, merely a rhetorical device. It is deeply pessimistic, yet I contend that in its characterisation of Marlow it can be seen as offering a complex prototype of a way of living with dignity and compassion in a hostile universe. Certainly his is a prototype more attractive on the whole to modern sentiment than the figure which Langton portrays of Kant. For these reasons I would be inclined to recommend it for study with older, more capable and experienced students in an ethical literacy program. By inviting them to listen as privileged adults to Marlow's tale and to discuss it rigorously, they will be given an opportunity to forge in the classroom a community of shared belief which will help to sustain and develop whatever innate moral sense they possess. However, I have more than a little hesitation in embarking on such a project, since the level of understanding required to enter into such a rigorous discussion of the book might well prove beyond even the better students. A class would need to begin by examining *Heart of Darkness* as a modernist text from an earlier period illustrating a moment of ethical questioning and dialogue. They would then need to problematise this approach by treating it in post-structuralist terms as an example of the impossibility of the author completely controlling the signifying systems he brings into play. This might be demonstrated by studying Achebe's post-colonial reading of the novella alongside a Leavisite one, and by examining Conrad's gaps and silences in order to illustrate that the text sometimes 'says what it does not say'.

Not only would this be a difficult task for senior secondary students, it might also be judged by their teachers, who have their welfare as whole persons at heart, as potentially too dark. Indeed, this might be a book which should be left until students are older and more secure in their place in the world. As has been suggested in my discussion of the ethics of lying in this chapter, perhaps there is a case for sometimes remaining strategically silent about the whole truth as we perceive it, when those to whom we speak are particularly vulnerable, perhaps because of their youth, as in the case of some high school students, or because of their emotional state, as in the case of Kurtz's Intended and Kant's

correspondent, Maria von Herbert. In my experience of teaching such texts as Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and Sylvia Plath's *The Bell Jar* it is often the most intelligent and sensitive students who find themselves deeply depressed by certain elements of these works, in spite of my attempts to present them within a more positive context. On the other hand, we cannot go on protecting 17 and 18 year-olds from the vicissitudes of life and literature. Indeed, many may have already sought, outside school, far grimmer real and virtual experiences against which to measure their strength of body and mind. However, we can at least discuss such experiences in the classroom and, especially through literature, situate them in a wider cultural context where they may be seen as both biologically and culturally determined. Perhaps, for example, it might be possible to trace the idea of the rites of passage from immaturity to maturity from the mediaeval quest narrative, through *Robinson Crusoe*, to *Sons and Lovers*, *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Breaktime*. Indeed, elements of *Heart of Darkness* might be interpreted in this light. Such study can serve to make some of the unconscious forces at work in the lives of students conscious, and so open up these impulses for ethical scrutiny, judgement and choice.

As I have argued in the previous chapter, and as I will illustrate in discussing the remaining two texts in this chapter, I am not, however, convinced that the pessimistic view of life which Conrad and some other modernist writers seem to present, and which some post-structuralist ideas have been seen to suggest, is justified by the most recent scientific developments. If life is as *Heart of Darkness* suggests, then perhaps Kant's attempt to found ethics on rational and universal principles is indeed irrelevant and we must rely on (the occasional?) strategic lies in order to build and sustain a stable society. Yet, like Marlow, I remain uneasy about lies under any circumstances, as I do about censorship, even in schools. Why is that? Temperament? Upbringing? Or does the answer lie deeper? Perhaps Kant, Siebers and - to hark further back in this study - contemporary metaphysicians like Norris and Murdoch deserve further consideration. It may still prove possible to privilege principle over practice in our ethical deliberations.

3. *Breaktime* and the ethics of fiction: re-enchantment

The author, publisher and educator, Aidan Chambers, has written four of a projected series of six novels for teenagers and young adults, exploring various aspects of adolescence. Each of the novels focuses on a different youth who has reached a critical moment in his transition from childhood to manhood. Together, Chambers has said, they cover themes of 'physical experience' (*Breaktime*), 'kinds of love and our personal possessions' (*Dance on my Grave*), 'the clash of rational thought and irrational belief' (*Now I Know*) and 'friendship and the cost of becoming an adult' (*The Toll Bridge*). In the novels Chambers combines the conviction of an earlier critical tradition that he can examine and communicate certain 'themes' by means of literature, with a post-structuralist interest in how both literature and life are problematised by language. Hence he says that the novels 'share a pair of common themes: language and how we are all composed of the language we speak and think; and story as the form in which we use language to create and recreate ourselves - our ideas about who we are, where we have come from, what we might be'. (cited on the flyleaf of Chambers, 1987)

In these comments Chambers apparently claims that the self is constructed entirely by discourse, although not just the discourses which impinge upon us from our environment, for he also allows us a degree of personal agency in creating and recreating ourselves through language. But how does such agency work? Can it be explained entirely in terms of the complex, interactive nature of language and discourse? Or is there a self whose agency springs ultimately from pre-linguistic operations in the biological structures of the brain? Chambers' remark that the first of the novels, *Breaktime* (first published in 1978), is about physical experience suggests that he is interested in the relationship between bodily senses and the way we interpret them through language.

Certainly *Breaktime* deals directly with the way in which its hero, seventeen year-old Ditto, takes an important step towards independence through writing a story. The novel signals the complex interdependence of language and the world, revealing the problems as well as the possibilities of referentiality. It highlights the *limitations* of language and the role of physical experience in providing a knowledge of self and others which can only be hinted at in words. It shows that ethical choice depends on the ability to represent to ourselves past experiences through our memory of sense impressions as well as through our reflections upon them in language, and to project possibilities for future actions

and their consequences. But it also shows that many choices are made subconsciously - pre-linguistically - and are no less reliable because of that.

Breaktime opens with Ditto talking to his friend, Morgan, during 'morning break' (one of many references in the novel which give multiple significance to the title). They are discussing Morgan's desire for sexual experience with the latest girl of his dreams, Maureen Pinfold. Maureen's surname, combining pin-up and centre-fold, is the first indication that Chambers is writing in an overtly symbolic style. Here too he introduces one of the themes of the novel: the influence which textually induced stereotypes have over the way adolescent boys fantasise about girls. From this opening scene the narrative is dominated by a self-conscious cleverness which is particularly appropriate to the bright, somewhat pompously punning sixth-formers who are its central characters. Such cleverness is also appropriate to the self-reflexiveness of the novel's themes, for this is a story about the value of telling stories. The verbal playfulness (reminiscent of Derrida's puns and neologisms) is especially evident in the dialogue and in the various parts of the story which purport to have been written by Ditto himself, and it extends to the use of a wide variety of genres, styles and word plays - even to various graphic devices such as comic book illustrations. Indeed, at first sight, *Breaktime* appears to be an example of writing in which the postmodernist manner of the medium is at least partly the message.

Ditto's name (actually a nickname) suggests that, taken as a real person, he is simply a repetition of the multiplicity of texts which have intersected in his life, and, taken as a fictional character, he belongs to a type familiar to readers of that genre of novels about artistic youths struggling to establish their identity, which includes D. H. Lawrence's *Sons and Lovers*, James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. He suspects that both his father and his friend, Morgan, look down on him because he has had so little physical experience and has derived most of his knowledge of life from books. He is particularly distressed by his disastrous relationship with his chronically ill father and by the fact that at seventeen he has not yet had sexual intercourse. Ditto is indeed a literary-minded youth and defends book learning by quoting his English teacher's dictum that 'literature offers us images to think with. That its unreality has nothing to do with untruth'. (Chambers, 1995: 8) But Morgan, who is of a more scientific and practical bent, reinforces his scorn for the value of literary fiction by presenting Ditto with a list of charges against it, claiming that as entertainment it has been superseded by film and television; that fact is truth and fiction is a lie; that novels make life look more tidy and logical than it really is; that reading fiction is merely playing at

life; and that, in short, literature is 'CRAP' (a complaint familiar to many secondary school English teachers!)

At this point in the novel Ditto's uneasiness and desire for change might be explained simply in terms of a conflict between discourses - in this case between the arts and sciences, or C.P. Snow's 'two cultures'.⁴² Elsewhere the conflict is between the discourses of his own education and that of his parents; or of his masculine and Helen's feminine attitudes (Helen is an old schoolmate who has moved to another town); or of his own heterosexuality and the homosexuality of his new acquaintances, Jack and Robby; or of his political scepticism and Robby's leftist fanaticism. However, Chambers' characterisation is more complex, for Ditto, together with almost all the adolescents in the book, is also shown to be motivated by more primitive imperatives which are fundamentally biological although culturally modified: namely sex and the urge to break free from parental restraints and expectations. Thus Chambers depicts adolescence as a time of dramatic change, a 'breaktime', when the self can be reformed for better or for worse, and he seems especially keen to show that the conscious self is capable of exercising a high degree of control over this process. First he has Ditto become conscious of the derivative nature of his personality and of a desire for new and life-changing experiences - particularly a sexual encounter. Then he has Ditto make plans both to seek out such experiences and to reflect upon them in a variegated style of narrative which will allow him to shape, according to his own wishes, the new self which emerges. In so doing, Ditto also sees his chance to show Morgan that a fictionalised account of real-life events can give a meaning to them which Morgan will acknowledge as true-to-life.

At the end of the novel Chambers humorously depicts Morgan as being convinced that Ditto's narrative is factual reportage, but then has Ditto quickly unsettle this illusion, leaving Morgan wondering how much of it is actually fiction:

Morgan made for the door.
'I'm in the thing,' he said as he went. 'Are you saying I'm just a
character in a story?'
Aren't we all?' said Ditto and laughed. (139)

Of course the reader knows that Morgan, Ditto and the rest are indeed just characters in Chambers' story. But how fictitious a tale is that? After all, Ditto has told Morgan that 'All fiction starts from something'. (138) As I will show,

⁴² A conflict which I consider still cripples the humanities and the sciences today, and which I hope this study might play some small part in breaking down. A more detailed contribution to bridging this gap between the latest scientific theories and post-structuralist philosophies and literary studies may be found in Damien Broderick. (1994)

Chambers' novel not only imitates a familiar genre, but is also partly based on his own youth and is constrained by his notion of what is true-to-life, thus raising interesting questions for the criticism of autobiographical and historical fiction which could be taken up in the classroom. Yet Ditto, in asking his question, seems to be speaking as Chambers' representative of the human race. If we are all, including Chambers, characters in a story, who or what is the author? Is it God, as the eighteenth century philosopher George Berkeley (1710) maintained and as, following him, Jostein Gaarder (1995) has playfully (or seriously?) suggested in his philosophical fiction for adolescents, *Sophie's World*? Or is it discourse? Or evolution? Or our conscious or unconscious selves? I hope to show that Chambers thinks we are constructed by some mixture of all these. But if so, what exactly is the formula and how might it vary for each individual? These are questions which will undoubtedly engage scientists and philosophers for a very long time to come, and which can be introduced to secondary students in critical discussions of *Breaktime*.⁴³ Meanwhile it is clear that Chambers gives great credence to Ditto's power to recreate his personality by opening himself to new experiences and by consciously shaping their effect on his mind by means of narrative. Hence Ditto is presented as self-'authoring' (and therefore in a very real sense a character in his own story) and self authorising. Thus in order to grow up he and Helen must become their own authorities, morally autonomous adults, who have adopted, among other values, a different sexual morality from that of their parents.

However, at many points in the story Ditto appears to be motivated by powers which are outside his control but to which he sometimes willingly, sometimes unwillingly, submits. Some of these are external, as has already been noted, including: a tantalising note and photograph from Helen;⁴⁴ the manipulative machinations of Robby, who uses Ditto in carrying on a feud with his father; and the influence of drinking too much alcohol. But some of Ditto's motives stem from his own subconscious, and it is these which particularly interest me here. One of the clearest examples occurs when Ditto unwittingly offends Helen at their first meeting:

⁴³ One small step towards determining this formula has been suggested by Paul Churchland (1995) when he points out that 'a mature human brain has at least 10^{14} independent synaptic connections, whereas the human genome contains only 2×10^9 base pairs of 'letters'. Plainly, the bulk of human synaptic configuration must be shaped by postnatal experience of the real world. Moreover, of the portion that is genetically specified, one would expect it to be concerned with very basic biological functions, such as suckling, rather than with sophisticated frameworks for apprehending the intricacies of high-level cognition. After all, the infant human doesn't have any high level cognition at birth, and won't develop any for many months to come'. (321)

⁴⁴ An opportunity could arise here to discuss with students the semiotics of visual texts, including photographs.

He felt an impulsive desire to probe her presence with him now, to hear her reason it. He knew before he spoke that his question was a mistimed curiosity. But he could not help himself. (62)

Helen is offended and runs off to catch her bus. Ditto castigates himself for his folly while trying to make sense of it:

... Stupy. Why. To stop anything coming too close. Is that it. Afraid to be known. To be vulnerable. It's so. Admit. Foolarse. Afraid what you'll learn about yourself. True. It is. Pity 'tis. Twit.

Unthought conclusions sent him sprinting from the castle, belongings left abandoned by the wall. (63)

He sees Helen through the window of the bus where she sits crying and refusing to look at him. As the bus leaves he has just time enough to scribble 'HELP' (the primal human message?) on the back of a docket, lick the paper and slap it on the window. Impulsive action has got Ditto into trouble and he hopes that impulsive action will get him out of it. He instinctively appeals to Helen's good nature and later is rewarded. Ditto contacts her by phone, they meet, share a picnic lunch, talk and finally, after Helen has shut him up by saying, 'Don't talk any more, word child', (122)⁴⁵ they make love.

Chambers has found a clever and humorous way of conveying their sexual encounter in words, by juxtaposing three texts, each of which progressively distances the reader from the eroticism of the scene. A first person, past tense narrative of their actions is interlined in italics with a stream of consciousness account of Ditto's simultaneous thoughts, and paralleled in the right hand column of the page by Dr Spock's more clinical description of lovemaking. By this means Chambers offers a conjunction of accounts drawn from the discourses of 'realist' and modernist fiction, and from medical/educational texts. So even their sexual encounter is graphically portrayed as conditioned by textual conventions. However, at the moment of sexual climax Ditto's inner monologue is finally stilled and the other two descriptions also give way to blank space. Then Chambers has Ditto write:

Thought returns
A sense of place
Of being

exhausted flat-out quenched desireless body able still to pleasure in the
aftertaste of body on body made poignant by a reasonless sense of loss sweet
with gratitude but still no words to speak no wish to say (126)

⁴⁵ The use of the phrase 'word child' is perhaps an intertextual reference to Iris Murdoch's (1975) novel, *A Word Child*, which is also concerned with the difficult relations between language and experience.

Lovemaking stands in *Breaktime* as the ultimate symbol of a powerfully life-changing physical experience. It is one which is motivated by instinct and significantly shaped by discourse, or culture - as Dr Spock points out in the passage mentioned above. (123) Yet it is finally inexpressible in words. Even after Helen has gone, leaving only a letter - another text - in place of her presence, Ditto does not immediately reflect on the meaning of the event; instead he acts intuitively:

When I woke, the sun was setting. Egg yolk in deepening blue.
My sleeping bag covered me. Helen's doing, I supposed.
I looked for her. Found not her, but her note lying by my side
weighted by a dalesstone.
I read it.
Then lay back. Wordless thought.
Then, impulse: I had to go back home. Whatever I had come for, I
now had. But had yet to sort out.
I felt good as soon as I moved, being busy again with purpose.
Whatever I am to be, I am not a drifter, a taker-or-leaver of life. I know that
now, if no more. (128)

Following this impulse - an admirably moral one as it becomes apparent - Ditto returns home to set things right with his father, only to find that his father has experienced a 'breaktime' too.⁴⁶ Languishing in hospital after a heart attack brought on by Ditto's last row with him, and with Ditto away, he has written a very touching letter of *rapprochement* to his son. This is yet another example of the role of text in shaping lives. Ditto learns something of his father's own life-changing experiences and frustrated ambitions as a young man, and so is able to relate to him better. The final symbol of the emergence of Ditto's confident adult self appears when he clears his room of all his boyish possessions as if he were breaking free of a chrysalis. And with this minor renaissance, the prosaic culmination of all the exciting adventures in his story, especially of his delighted first sexual experience, the world has taken on a new enchantment.

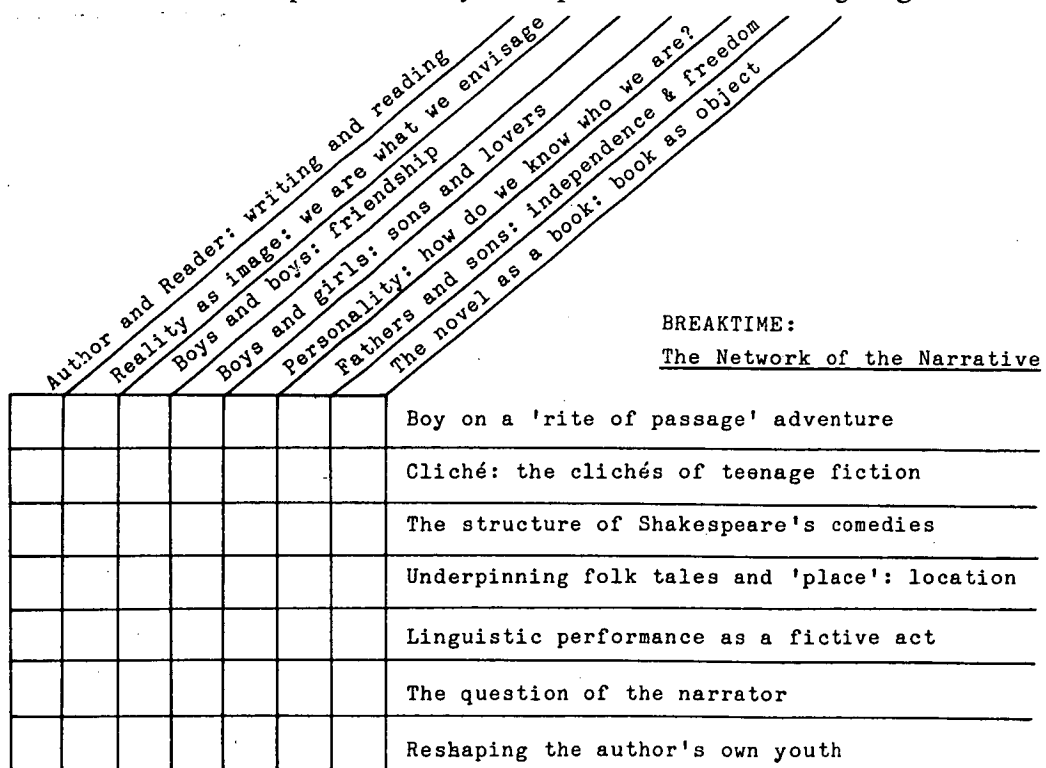
Adolescents reading Ditto's story may certainly learn from it and be encouraged by it. For some it might even significantly shape their lives, but it will be no substitute for *both* physical experiences and reflections of their own.

In 1985, under the title 'Ways of Telling - from writer to reader: an author reads himself', Chambers published a compilation of lectures he had given on what he had set out to do in writing *Breaktime* and its sequel, *Dance on my Grave*. (Chambers, 1985b: 92-115) His detailed analysis of the genesis of *Breaktime* and of its highly complex structure reveals that he had been drawing

⁴⁶ In psychoanalytic and feminist terms, of course, Ditto's impulse could also be seen as a troublingly, if unrecognisedly, Oedipal one, in which the 'silent' female mother/lover is subordinated to the vital male father/son relationship.

consciously upon structuralist and post-structuralist ideas when he began to conceive and formulate his themes. As he writes this analysis he is also aware that he is revisiting his novels as a reader: he quotes Roland Barthes that 'the birth of the reader is at the cost of the death of the author' and reassures his audience that his reading of his work is only one valid 'translation' among many. (92) Yet it is clear that Chambers is a particularly privileged reader, having inside knowledge of the 'intentions' of the author, albeit as a memory subject to all manner of distorting influences.

Chambers' reading of *Breaktime* draws overtly upon the theorists Wayne Booth, Roland Barthes, Gérard Genette, and Hans-Georg Gadamer, showing how the novel makes a story out of some of their ideas about the relationships between experience, memory, language, story and narration. Furthermore he attests to modelling his novel on aspects of the work of Shakespeare, D.H. Lawrence, Proust and Lewis Carroll, and on four folk-tales associated with the Richmond area of Yorkshire where *Breaktime* is set. Indeed, Chambers sees his work as even more complicated than this, since he presents *Breaktime* as a narrative 'network' founded upon seven underpinning layers of influence or, to use his geological metaphor, 'strata',⁴⁷ which give form to seven key themes or features in the landscape of the story, as depicted in the following diagram:



(Chambers 1985b: 95)

⁴⁷ Does Chambers use this scientific metaphor to give authority to 'artistic' creation? Whatever his motive it is a happy use of language from my point of view, since I am arguing for a recognition of the similarities between scientific and artistic forms of knowledge, as will become clearer in my discussion of 'Morpho Eugenia'.

Chambers goes on to explain in some detail how his work was shaped by the items listed in the vertical column of his grid, though occasionally he cuts his discussion frustratingly short, as in the following passage:

Language must be uttered before it can be heard. Naturally, therefore, a whole stratum of the narrative's geology, the next level down, is composed of the hard-rock question: Who is telling the story? Whose voice do we hear? Who is the narrator?

I wish we had time to dig into these puzzles, for they are the ones that presently fascinate me about the writing of fiction. For the moment I'll only note that the use of first- and third-person voices in *Breaktime* was not arbitrary, and that the choice of voice for each passage was considered from a number of points of view, mostly to do with the problem of the narrator rather than the technical reason that the first-person creates an effect of immediacy and closeness to the protagonist while the third-person creates a sense of distance, of being an observer rather than a participant. The juxtaposing of the voices is meant to help compose a polyphony, and a duality of personality, so that the reader stands now within, now without, the story, and 'hears' the linguistic shifts more keenly than would be the case without the use of this device. (Specialist critics will know that Gérard Genette's chapter on 'Voice' in *Narrative Discourse* lays out the principal ideas that group around this element in fiction, where he searches from Proust the authorial impulse behind extradiegetic and heterodiegetic usage.) (103, 104)

Chambers also ignores Barthes' and Kristeva's ideas of unwilling 'intertextuality', or the idea that every text is a mosaic of quotations from the culture'. This includes Derrida's 'already said', or the notion that the values of the culture are transmitted through its verbal artworks. These are important considerations in the interpretation of authorial functions. Nevertheless, if we return to Chambers' novel with his few comments in mind, perhaps it will reveal enough of what he has made of Genette's treatment of such matters.

Chambers' account of his novel is admirably clear about the role of language in the creation and recreation of the self. However, his treatment of the theme of physical experience (which figures in less general and explicit terms in the horizontal axis of his grid) tends to underplay the way such experience *subconsciously* enables and directs value judgements, including ethical decisions. (I should stress here that I am not using the term 'subconsciously' in its Freudian sense, but rather in Paul Churchland's sense of the way the brain processes experience by operations which are non-linguistic and unconscious.) It remains much clearer in Chamber's novel that there is a realm of knowledge which is acquired through our senses and which can at best be only hinted at in language. Yet, as I have shown, that is about as far as Chambers goes in *Breaktime* since he is keen to suggest that the whole of our self-knowledge (or at least the only useful part of it) must be constructed in language through the stories we tell about ourselves after the events. However, this is to limit the images of sight, sound, touch, taste and smell, and whatever strange intimations

we have of our mental states, which we are able to recall from our store of experience without describing them in words. It is also to ignore the albeit limited powers of artists, such as painters and musicians, to represent experiences which cannot be conveyed in speech or writing. Indeed, there remains a self-knowledge which is ultimately private but nonetheless real and influential for all that it defies representation in any public medium. And it is important that writers, critics and teachers should acknowledge this fact in the stories they tell about human experience.

Chambers comes close to fulfilling this imperative in his 1985 lecture when he discusses the personal experiences which have informed his novel. His first mention of them is in the lowest stratum on the vertical axis of his grid, titled, 'Reshaping the author's own youth', its lowly position suggesting that this is in other respects deeply buried material. Later he comments on this stratum as follows:

Move down another layer and we reach the most difficult topic of all for me to say anything about, not least because I'm still unclear about it myself. At this level is confronted the relationship that inevitably exists between the three elements: the fictive act as a linguistic performance; the person of the narrator; and the author himself in his first-person existence. Again we might pose the problem in questions: What has the author given the book? What has the book given the author? Or: Where am I in this book and what am I doing in it?

Judging from the inordinate interest there is in the biography of writers, which often exceeds interest in their books, I suspect a lot of people find this the subject that engages their curiosity most of all. But, as I say, it isn't part of our discussion today so I'll leave it alone, with this one hint. I sometimes think that what I was doing in *Breaktime* was shaping - or rather reshaping - my own youth, re-examining it in the light of the years since then. But this is tentative and inadequate, and is offered only as a talking point for those determined to pursue biographical lines of inquiry. (105)

'Biographical lines of inquiry' are considered almost indefensibly outmoded by post-structuralists, yet it is salutary to be reminded that many readers are deeply interested in whatever an author's work might reveal about his or her personal life. Authors are constantly confronted with this fact in the crowds who turn up to literary lunches and writers' festivals, but, like Chambers, they are often wary of the conclusions readers might draw from their books about their private lives - and indeed from anything they might 'reveal' in their public persona as promoter of their books. In fact, as Chambers is at pains to explain about his own work, authors are often careful to distance their fictional narrative from any autobiographical sources. (98) The popularity of literary biographies also attests to the fascination readers have with the relationship between the life and the work, while the variant readings offered by subsequent biographers show just how elusive is the discovery of any ultimate truth in this quest. But perhaps it is this very elusiveness, the inexpressibility in language of the deepest springs of

personality, which drives the reader's curiosity about the author. The reader lives in hope that maybe this artist, who is so linguistically gifted in telling stories about human experience, will be able to disclose the innermost secrets of herself, secrets which the reader can never articulate about himself - and which perhaps he would be reluctant to expose to himself, let alone to others, even if he could name them.

The notion that there exists truths about ourselves which lie beyond our grasp both stimulates us to try to approach them as nearly as we can, and allays our fears that we might actually find them and then perhaps stand exposed as unacceptable. Most importantly, though, the existence of such truths places upon the author an ethical imperative to make her fiction as truthful as possible, not necessarily in revealing intimate secrets about her personal life, but in being true to some part of human experience. Chambers indirectly acknowledges this duty when he describes how he came to set *Breaktime* in the landscape in which he had grown up:

The invaluable authorial experience this setting gave me...was discovering how to find in myself and in my own life reference points for truth by which to test the veracity of a character's experience during the writing of a novel. It taught me how to use autobiography in the creation of a fiction without turning the fiction into autobiography. In other words, it taught me how to use myself to write truth in fiction while also keeping my distance. I don't say I can always do it, only that taking the risk showed me what fictional truth really means.
(99)

Like Emmanuel Lévinas' imperative to 'be for the Other', which he considers to be the foundation of the moral self, and which finds expression when the self merely apprehends 'the Face of the Other' before any appeal is made, (Baumann, 1993: 72,73) the imperative to write has pre-linguistic motives. For Chambers, writing gives expression to an imperative to be true to the tale which, whatever conscious forces may have shaped it, in the final analysis has come to him from he knows not where inside his head. But what Chambers does not acknowledge sufficiently in this lecture is that the author also has a definitively moral responsibility to tell the truth as best he can for his readers, in whom, since he can only imagine them, he apprehends the Face of the Other before a word is exchanged. Ironically, the author does this most effectively by struggling to tell the truth to and for himself. And it *is* a struggle, first because our unconscious self remains largely a mystery, an Other, to our consciousness (for reasons explained by Churchland's account of the non-linguistic processes which constitute most of our mental activity, and by Wright's evolutionary account of the way our social success is often facilitated by not recognising our deeply selfish motives), and second because there are

things about ourselves which we do not want to face, just as there were for Ditto.

To realise that one has lied to oneself can be at least as abhorrent as lying to another: witness Marlow's scruples in *Heart of Darkness*, even though he felt that under the circumstances it was right to tell a lie. It seems that no fruitful relationships, whether between one's various selves or between different people, can flourish where there can be no trust. The fundamental enterprise of communication through language depends upon the general assumption that one's interlocutors are attempting to speak the truth as they perceive it. Furthermore, those who lose sight of the truth about themselves - such as by not acknowledging and trusting to their instincts as at least a partial guide - or who have developed completely distinct multiple personalities, can ultimately become subject to the most debilitating and painful delusions. Of course there are disorders of the mind which do not necessarily have their roots in moral choices, as the chemical aetiology of schizophrenia demonstrates. Yet self-deception may be as common among reasonably sane people as is lying - or at least telling lazy half-truths - to others among reasonably honest people, and such lying is no less a temptation to authors of fiction.⁴⁸ Paradoxically, one of the truths about ourselves - one which Chambers seems to have overlooked in this lecture, in spite of his dedication to telling the truth in literature - is that, even if we want to, we cannot tell the whole truth about both our conscious and unconscious experiences, and yet those experiences profoundly shape our lives.

In his discussion of the themes of his novel, *Dance on my Grave*, Chambers says,

My personal conviction is that we are not changed by our experiences, as common wisdom has it. What changes us are the stories we tell about our experiences. Until we have re-formed our lives into story-structured words we cannot find and contemplate the meaning of our lived experiences. Till then they remain in the realm of beastly knowledge. Only by turning the raw material of life into story - by putting it into a pattern of words which we call narrative - can beastly knowledge be creatively transformed and given meaning. (112)

As Nussbaum (1990) and Siebers (1992) attest, the universal practice of giving symbolic meaning to our lives by reflecting on them in the stories we tell is

⁴⁸ A recent example of an author who may have lied to herself in lying about the historical foundations of her fiction and about her own identity as author in promoting her book is Helen Darville/Demidenko. (1995) Many critics have stridently defended her right to use fiction to distort history, declaring for example that a genuinely postmodern novel deliberately distorts the past in the attempt to show that historical discourse is subject to both deliberate and inadvertent error. Here, perhaps, is an example of telling a deliberate lie as a means to securing what is regarded as a greater good. But would it not be possible to make this point about the problems of historical discourse without adding to the deliberate errors? Just because truth-seeking in history is problematic, should we risk abandoning the attempt altogether?

evidence of a deep, even obsessive, need. And our ability as a species to change our lives through language and other discursive practices is testimony to the plasticity of the human mind, as evidenced by the extraordinary variety of cultures humans have produced. Yet I think Chambers overstates his case as far as individual agency is concerned. Experiences, *prior* to their representation in language, do change us, as he demonstrates in *Breaktime*. Also he speaks too slightly of 'beastly knowledge'. Modern evolutionary biology has shown more and more convincingly that we are different in degree rather than kind from the beasts, and that beasts are capable of some learning and reasoning even though they possess signifying systems far less highly elaborated than those which constitute human language. (Diamond 1991; Churchland 1995) Furthermore, advances in brain science have shown that the extreme complexity of human language may well be a product of the sheer computing power of our larger neural networks rather than of a special feature of the brain which has evolved uniquely in humans. Contrary to the more widely accepted view of Noam Chomsky,⁴⁹ Paul Churchland has offered persuasive evidence in support of this hypothesis, arguing that the operation of the human brain is essentially the same as that of all sentient species. He also demonstrates that much of the brain's processing of information takes place in its own 'machine language' (to borrow a phrase from computer science) in realms completely inaccessible to reflection undertaken either with or without language. Thus 'beastly [i.e. subconscious, pre-linguistic] knowledge' is indeed human knowledge which grounds, and to a significant degree determines, the self. As I have argued in Chapter 2, a part of that self is genetically constructed, after which it is further elaborated upon as the brain subconsciously processes the intersecting physical and discursive experiences to which it is subjected from birth. Only in a limited way is it possible for us to consciously 'rewrite' ourselves during this learning process.

Theories of the construction of the self which ignore its grounding in the evolution of human physiology and in the brain's powers of subconscious learning are almost certainly mistaken and give rise to significant problems in the realm of ethics, such as an undue belief in the power of moral rules to change behaviour, or in the adequacy of rationalist systems of ethics. Hence, in my exploration of the possibilities for ethical criticism after post-structuralism, I have turned to recent developments in evolutionary biology, brain science and quantum mechanics and their implications for moral philosophy, as well as to

⁴⁹ Chomsky's view that the language facility is partly innate, as opposed to Churchland's view that it is fully learned, possibly gives greater support to my final point here, which is to maintain that there is a biologically determined - i.e. essential - human nature which is pre-linguistic and which sets significant limits to the plasticity of the mind under the influence of cultural discourses. However, on the former point I find Churchland's arguments more convincing.

the postmodern ethics of Zygmunt Baumann, based on the work of Emmanuel Lévinas. I repeat that I do not pretend to have constructed more than a precursory synthesis of these ideas (Baumann and other exponents of postmodernism claim that such totalised theories are a dangerous illusion anyway), but I hope at least to demonstrate that literary critics and teachers of English should not ignore them.

Nature and nurture (or biology and discourse) both play a part in constructing the self, leaving it some scope - though not as much as Chambers would like - to consciously reconstruct itself through the invention of stories, both histories and possible futures. It is likely that if we really want to change ourselves (and our children) we will be best served by subjecting ourselves repeatedly to appropriate physical and social, as well as aesthetic, experiences from which our brains will learn unconsciously through the 'vector processing mechanisms' which Churchland describes. In this learning, conscious reflection through language may well play only a facilitating role. Teachers, writers, inventors - indeed all serious learners - know from experience how significant strides in understanding are often made during a time when our attention is focussed on repetitive drills, on something else entirely, or on nothing at all. Even reading, which might seem to be an almost purely conscious linguistic experience, works upon the mind in subliminal ways, creating salutary effects of learning which defy articulation by the most gifted of literary critics. It is a common experience for readers to feel that their minds have been briefly but satisfyingly re-ordered during the reading of a 'good' book, and to sense - not dimly but radiantly - that they grasp things which neither they nor the critics can adequately communicate to others after the event, except by recommending that they experience for themselves the reading of that 'marvellous' book. Such aesthetic and ethical literary experiences do, of course, change lives but not, perhaps, as much as teachers of English would like to think. And maybe this is not such a bad thing, since people expose themselves to what some consider to be morally damaging material as well as to that which is potentially uplifting.

Significantly, Chambers' use of the word 'contemplation' in the passage quoted above seems to support my view rather than his, since contemplation is often associated with an opening of oneself - beginning sometimes with words but extending through silence - to insights into the meaning of our lives which precede and transcend language. Indeed Chambers approaches this idea when he says at the end of his lecture:

I know I've mentioned contemplation a number of times. That's because, for me, all reading is an act of contemplation... Contemplation is important to me because only in contemplation do I realise myself. Some will say that this invests the reading of literature with religious significance. I

wouldn't argue with that. For me it has. Perhaps one day I'll write an explanation of its significance. But not yet. For where *Breaktime* and *Dance on my Grave* have led me is to a story about this very idea. I didn't realise they were, of course, while writing them. But I'm amused now to find [in *Dance on my Grave*] Hal's teacher, Jim Osborn, telling him, 'If you go on like this you'll turn religious, you know that, don't you?' Sometimes your books know where you're going, or where they're taking you, a long time before you know yourself. (115)

Here again Chambers acknowledges that his stories are shaped by hidden, pre-linguistic forces, leading to the discovery of truths which his conscious mind had not imagined. But he does not take the next step of admitting that his contemplation after the event might pass over into 'post-linguistic' realms of understanding, even though he is willing to call this contemplation religious.

The story which he says *Breaktime* and *Dance on my Grave* have led him to is probably his next novel in the sequence, (1987) *Now I Know*, which Chambers has said (see p. 134 above) is about 'the clash of rational thought and irrational belief'. In this story his youthful hero, Nik, examines the claims of Christian faith and arrives at a re-interpretation of religious belief consonant with his modern materialist culture. It is a belief in the immanence rather than the transcendence of God. In this respect Chambers espouses the kind of contemporary Platonism which I have outlined in Chapter 2.6. Chambers has Nik and his friend, Julie, express their belief brilliantly in words, but Nik had first to discover it through physically re-enacting Christ's crucifixion, since the only kind of knowledge which could ultimately convince Nik of the truth of belief in God was the bodily-beastly-empirical knowledge which comes through physical experience. The fear and pain of his crucifixion is, of course, reflected upon afterwards in language, but here Chambers has Nik also write, 'Another conclusion from the experiment: people do things more for hidden reasons than for stated ones. Each of us is a galaxy of secret lives'. (Chambers 1987: 213) In the end Julie, who is further down the path of Christian commitment than Nik, determines to live her faith 'hidden among ordinary people in an ordinary everyday place while I do ordinary everyday work.' (230) According to Chambers, the ultimate expression of religious belief is therefore to be found in bodily actions performed for and with others - of which the reductive incarnation of thoughts in speech and writing is perhaps only one example.

Here at last Chambers arrives at an ethics truly grounded in the body and reaching out to the whole physical universe. Interestingly, in its emphasis on ordinary work and compassion, it is similar to the ethics of Captain Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, although Conrad elaborated his somewhat disillusioned version from an atheistic perspective. Chambers has enunciated an ethics of re-enchantment, lived out in deeds as well as words which spring ultimately from

deep, pre-linguistic motives.⁵⁰ But can we afford to trust the future of human society to these hidden motives, as Conrad and Baumann claim we must? We have, Baumann says, no option, for we ought to have learnt by now that attempts to formulate in language a systematic universalist ethics at best fall short of the whole truth and at worst pervert it into some monstrous philosophy such as the Nazis, following perhaps in the footsteps of Conrad's Mr Kurtz, used to justify the Holocaust. Moreover, Baumann argues that ethics enunciates a rational system of duties, a law which obligates all people, forestalling any free, and therefore (in Lévinas' sense) moral, acts motivated by an impulse to be for the Other whether or not the Other feels any obligation to reciprocate. Thus he maintains that *in the end* the 'unfounded' moral impulses of conscience, in spite of all the influences of culture, must be our guide. It should be noted that when Baumann says this, he has in mind exactly those extreme circumstances which prevailed in Nazi Germany when the national culture provided a seemingly 'rational' justification for the elimination of the Jews. To acquiesce to one's 'civic duty' in these circumstances by betraying one's neighbour might be understandable but could never be excusable. Here conscience alone dictates our duty to be for the Other before all our apparently reasonable duties to the state. (Baumann 1993: 249) This situation compares and contrasts nicely with that of Kurtz who, cut off from the moral constraints of his own culture and isolated among tribes whom he wrongly regarded as morally inferior, abandoned the dictates of conscience and resorted to abominable measures which he thought were justified by the standards of the savages.

I believe Baumann is right in his assessment of the collaborators in the Holocaust, but in more normal circumstances I would still want to balance his faith in our intuitive motives to be for the Other (which evolutionary psychology argues are in fact founded upon the social needs of basically selfish individuals) with Chambers' emphasis on the role of literary contemplation, conducted in dialogue with others, in shaping our lives aright. Chambers is not a Kantian: for him morals are not grounded in a metaphysics which is transparent to reason alone. Rather in Chambers' ethics, the private and less rational processes of belief need to alternate with the public and more reasonable processes of language, the former setting our fundamental directions (in principles such as friendship, love and sacrifice) and the latter shaping our actions in meaningful structures responsive to, though not necessarily in conformity with, our context.

⁵⁰ A feminist reading of Conrad and Chambers would justifiably claim that for both these writers ethics is an activity of male intellects in a male inner society (e.g. Marlow's group of friends/peers), while women act as inspiration, muse, enigma, mystery - representative of all that is 'other' to the rational, choice-making controller of the narrative. Thus in their novels males tell the 'true' story of civilised ethics!

And in this process stories do not so much serve to illustrate and contextualise moral principles, absolute or otherwise, as they are necessary to experimenting with how best to live, and to forging a more conscious and considered form of agency which can better translate the findings of these experiments into practice. Thus (to change the metaphors again) stories, if not the ultimate progenitors of moral autonomy, are certainly its nursemaids.

Chambers began his lecture by joking that he is not God and by declaring that his reading of his books is only one of many possible interpretations. At the end of the lecture he says,

None of my writing, whether fictional or critical, is either an end in itself or ever comes to an end. None of it is self-contained. None of it is finished. All of it belongs, I hope and believe, to a continuum that cannot end. Which is as good a note as any on which to end this episode. (115)

Here Chambers also recognises the intertextuality of writing. The margins of a book are not determinate; each fiction is a node within a network, thus opening up the possibility of an ethical dialogue between fictions which will stimulate readers to enter into ethical questioning. Chambers' continued readiness to open his deeply held ideas to such public discussion and to the necessity of revision makes him an admirably reasonable author, educator and critic. Together with a profound optimism, founded ultimately in an intuitively religious view of life, he exemplifies the kind of modest, open-ended rationality which is the hallmark of ethical education and which offers some further insurance against the return of a fascist state. With this in mind, then, I must now take issue with a minor aspect of Chambers' novel, *Breaktime*, which I believe renders it a little less than satisfactory as an ethical fiction for young adults.

I have often thought that *Breaktime* would be an excellent book to set in pre-tertiary or first year university literature courses, since it introduces so many structuralist and post-structuralist issues of textuality and provides great scope for the discussion of psychological and ethical questions which are particularly relevant and interesting to young adults. However, I know of no secondary school teacher who has been willing to recommend it as anything more than a wider reading text. A powerful reason for their hesitation is that the book appeals only to very clever and literary-minded students. Other teachers might have been reluctant to set it as a core text in even their top classes for fear of the backlash which would almost certainly come from some parents objecting to Chambers' treatment of adolescent sexuality. The same would be true for *Dance on my Grave* which focuses on a homosexual relationship without passing any judgement on its morality, even though in this book the sexual acts are only

implied. Regrettably, teachers are not always brave campaigners for a liberal education, since their jobs can be stressful enough without the strife which justifying the selection of controversial texts can cause.

In *Breaktime* Chambers raises the issue of parental disapproval of pre-marital sex through the following dialogue between Helen and Ditto:

'...You see, if I got preggers that would confirm their beliefs about life. Another of the traps. And if I liked the bloke and married him that would make it all right. I'd be properly trapped, paying for my mistakes, taking the consequences of my actions - all that guff. And I'd be there, lumbered, for them to cluck over still, giving advice, and, what's best, with a baby for them to feel sentimental about.'

'And all forgiven.'

'Of course.'

'But if you had fun, played hanky-panky and didn't get with child?'

'I'd be a loose woman. I'd be promiscuous and, worst of all, I'd be enjoying it. I'd be an unpaid whore, a happy hooker, a woman of easy virtue. Etcetera. That's what bothers them most.'

'Ugly words.'

'Ugly sentiments.'

'But never said straight out?'

'O, no. That's what makes it so horrible. I don't think I'd mind if they came straight out and said what they think. Trouble is, I suspect they don't even know that they think it. So it all comes out in innuendo, by implication. And somehow, that makes everything worse. Dirties everything.' (62, 63)

Clearly Helen does not share her parents' attitudes to sex - at least as Chambers has her present them - and is happily indulging in sexual liaisons. However, she is depicted as having *some* scruples, although they are still rather confused. She tells Ditto that the aunt with whom she is going to stay is 'a child-weary mother of eight, one more being imminent,' and adds, 'a prolific breeding record I regard as more suitable to rabbits than human beings'. (58) Later Helen reveals to Ditto that she is on the pill, but then says she started taking it just to shock her parents. (121) She also says, 'I know I have a reputation as an easy lay and I play up to it. But boys are shocking boasters. As a matter of fact, I've gone all the way only four times'. (120) She admits to Ditto, 'It's as though there are two people inside me, quite different people who have to take it in turns at being me'. (120, 121) One of these people, she says, likes to break the rules and one is afraid that things will go wrong. Perhaps such a seemingly confused young woman would be well advised not to get involved in sexual relationships with all their emotional and physical risks. Indeed, being confused about one's identity is typically adolescent, and so parents might be justified in wanting their teenagers to postpone sexual relationships. But fragmentation of the self is also simply human, since we are all partly constructed by so many conflicting biological and cultural influences, among them incompatible moral prototypes. Furthermore, at every age there seems to be something powerfully at work in

most people which wants to integrate the self - possibly an innate function of our brains which has evolved to focus our activities in order to survive in the physical and social worlds to which we are adapted. Thus Ditto asks Helen,

'Which one is you now?'
Her eyes found mine and held them with a cool firmness a little
frightening in its strength.
'Which one would you prefer?'
I tried to smile, to joke, 'Can't I have both?'
She did not smile in reply. 'I've never tried being both at once before.
Is it possible, do you think?'
How could I answer? (121)

It is then that Chambers has Helen and Ditto make love, an experience of momentary unification within and between selves, if ever there was one. Should adolescents be denied this experience at a time when they feel ready for it? Some parents take the view that adolescents should enjoy a full sexual life, as long as they also conduct it in a responsible manner. Yet that is a requirement which eludes many adults too.

Chambers' construction of Ditto's account of Helen makes it clear that she is being depicted through the lens of Ditto's male fantasy, so it must be said that all of the above *might* reveal more about the values of a boy like Ditto and a man like Chambers than those of any real-life girl. That notion in itself raises many important and interesting issues concerning the genetic and social construction of gender which ought to be addressed in class discussions of this novel. One very apposite topic might be the feminist concern that the whole era of sexual liberation has mostly been a covert privileging of male casual sexual contacts. Hence even more sensible and liberal-minded parents than Helen's three-times fictive ones⁵¹ might be worried about the fact that Ditto is portrayed as leaping (or maybe only fantasising about leaping) into the arms of this girl without first donning a condom, and as having no regrets afterwards. If students did not raise this matter in class discussion first, a responsible teacher might be expected to point out that, while the book was written in the pre-AIDS seventies, sexually active teenagers still had to worry about the old-fashioned venereal diseases and should therefore have protected themselves and each other. Unfortunately the joys of sex have never been without real dangers and the anxieties which justifiably attend them. Chambers wrote *Breaktime* specifically for a teenage audience, so it might be considered reasonable to chide him for neglecting to deal with this issue at least in passing. On the other hand, Chambers could object that his fiction is true to life and that still today it

⁵¹ We only know them through (1) Chambers' construction of (2) Ditto's account of (3) Helen's description of them.

is a regrettable fact that the majority of early sexual experiences are unprotected. He might also say that safe sex was not meant to be a theme of this novel - after all it is impossible to say everything in one book - and that he has been sufficiently responsible in depicting adolescents as enjoying sex, free from the destructive feelings of guilt which inappropriate social and religious values would lay upon them. Nevertheless, a feminist critic might still claim that Chambers' text speaks by its silences an ideology of patriarchal assumptions.

On balance I do not consider that Chambers' failure to raise the issue of safe sex is a sufficient reason for not teaching his book. Such matters can and should be dealt with in class discussion - if not in discussing this text, then at some other appropriate time. Also we should not forget that Chambers is writing for adolescents who are over the age of consent: he does not, on the whole, treat them patronisingly and neither should their parents or teachers. They will, after all, choose for themselves to read and view less ethically responsible works than this one, and will form their values in response to many other influences, not least those of their parents. Certainly the attempt by schools to inform and influence students' values in the area of sex education should be almost complete before the age of sixteen. It is high time after that to begin trusting teenagers to find their own way to moral autonomy. Helen and Ditto, Chambers' model adolescents, seem to be doing a pretty good job of it. On the other hand, the obsessively rebellious behaviour of Robby - Chambers' model of a disturbed young man - is certainly more worrying, but then he is disadvantaged by having a father who is apparently deeply hypocritical. With or without the example of their parents, adolescents will sometimes make serious mistakes. We cannot protect them from doing that any more than we can protect adults from their follies. Nevertheless, a carefully considered series of discussions of narrative ethical models is one form of assistance which society can offer its younger members.

Chambers accords a significant role to whatever power the writing and reading of stories has to shape and reshape moral impulses. This view fits nicely with Churchland's hypothesis about the nature of moral knowledge and how moral learning occurs through encounters with increasingly sophisticated and varied moral prototypes which can unconsciously guide behaviour *and* upon which it will be possible to consciously and rationally reflect. An ethics education program which relies too heavily upon the conscious reasoning component and which downplays the need for acquiring moral prototypes - especially through stories - is bound to fail. Yet a moral education program which downplays the need for rational deliberation about conflicting prototypes will fall short of developing whatever limited scope humans have for making

informed choices and thus will be guilty of gross indoctrination. Hence moral autonomy is at least in part the product of ethical literary criticism - and, more broadly, of ethical critical literacy.

4. 'Morpho Eugenia' and the ethics of disillusionment and re-enchantment

A.S. Byatt's novellas, 'Morpho Eugenia' and 'The Conjugal Angel', were first published in 1992 in one volume entitled *Angels and Insects*. Together they represent humans as living on the 'darkling' plain/plane which lies between the heavenly and subterranean realms - the homes respectively of angels and ants.⁵² The two central characters of these tales are confined to just one point in their 'two dimensional' habitat for almost the entire duration of their plots, but their consciousness is informed by personal and vicarious knowledge of other lives led in very different places on the surface of the planet. At the same time they receive intimations of life in different realms of the 'third dimension', as they seek a better understanding of their circumstances by inquiring into the existences of beings both higher and lower than themselves in the traditional order. The higher order is represented in the second story by the souls of the departed who (according to the heroine's Swedenborgian beliefs) have become angels, and the lower order in the first story by insects: butterflies, moths, bees and ants. In their quest for self-fulfilment Byatt's hero and heroine move in time, the fourth dimension, from illusion, through disillusionment, to a more realistic re-enchantment. Finally both stories celebrate the unique value of their lives, lived in full acceptance of their mortality, enlightened by an ethic of open-minded inquiry and reciprocal love, and inspired by modest hopes for a satisfying life in the years that remain to them before they are ultimately dissolved in the flux of the universe.

Both stories are set in Victorian England and written in a pseudo-nineteenth century realist style, brilliantly evoking key philosophical questions of that time and place, and subjecting them to the language play and postmodern re-reading of our time. In 'Morpho Eugenia' Byatt has her hero list some of these in terms of binary oppositions:

Instinct or Intelligence
Design or Hasard [sic]
The Individual and the Commonwealth
What is an Individual? (109)

Other issues focus on the relationships between religion and science, free will and determinism, and appearance and reality. In 'The Conjugal Angel' the most obvious issue is the search for metaphysical comfort by conducting seances to

⁵² In Hamlet's words, 'crawling between heaven and earth'. Hamlet has a typically modern ethical problem: having to decide between an old world order morality - kill your father's murderer if a ghost tells you to - and a new world order morality - be very, scientifically, sceptical, test the ghost's narrative, proceed by empirical observation.

contact the spirits of the dear departed, and so to find experimental evidence that humans are more than mere mortals. The reader cannot help but feel the relevance of the issues which trouble her characters to our own circumstances over a century later. In moving from a modern version of these concerns, as represented in their mid-nineteenth century guise in the novellas, to current postmodern versions, Byatt indicates that Western culture has still to explore their full ramifications, let alone answer satisfactorily the questions they raise. Indeed, in certain respects these questions have taken on a new urgency with the changing conditions of our lives. In the passage from modern to postmodern society some thinkers have adopted a profound pessimism about the possibility of answers to these questions, while others retain a modest optimism that some progress can be made towards their resolution.

A compelling reason why the search for such answers must be conducted more modestly is also the fundamental issue in both 'Morpho Eugenia' and 'The Conjugal Angel' - one which encapsulates all of the concerns listed above: I mean the problematic relationship between fiction and the world, or more broadly, between linguistic and other human constructs and the reality to which they purport to refer. This issue is usually seen as particularly postmodern, but it also has a forerunner in the nineteenth century, in concerns raised by the higher criticism of the Bible.⁵³ It is rarely discussed openly in *Angels and Insects*, yet in 'Morpho Eugenia' it is everywhere inherent in her presentation of experience and reflection in the pastiche of various kinds of texts which she has introduced into her 'self-conscious realism', as she has called it. (Byatt 1993: 4) Through several of her characters' use of the discourses of religion, science, and art, and of many different texts, Byatt seems to be asking what understandings of objective reality can be conveyed by religious and scientific constructions, and such linguistic artefacts as journals, letters, sermons, theological and philosophical speculations on natural history, the naming of insects, poems, myths, metaphors, analogies, allegories, fables, nursery rhymes, accounts of dreams, and word games. In 'The Conjugal Angel' the pastiche consists merely of letters, biblical quotations, excerpts of poetry, accounts of visions and automatic writing. Ultimately the reader is led to ask the same questions about

⁵³ Byatt (1993) mentions higher criticism at a number of points in *Passions of the Mind*, but see especially pp. 94-95. Iris Murdoch (1992) make an interesting point in this context: 'If one is too 'faithful' [to the text] one may merely reproduce unassimilated ideas which remain remote and dead; if one is too 'inventive' one may lose the original and present one's own thoughts instead of the great thoughts to which one should have attended more carefully. This is of course a dilemma which belongs to any sort of interpretation. Structuralism, which tends to emphasise inventiveness at the expense of faithfulness, is also interested in this matter. Theorising about such difficulties can become an end in itself. Such theorising may be another way of losing the original. Methods of interpretation in various fields are all the time under scrutiny by individual thinkers, and sometimes, as in biblical criticism, it is worth making a large general issue of the matter'. (510)

what Byatt herself is able to convey through her own subtly postmodern use of realist fiction in these paired novellas.

In the introduction to *Passions of the Mind: Selected Writings* (1993) Byatt declares that the concerns which I maintain she is exploring in *Angels and Insects* have exercised her mind for a long time:

I have tried to be scholarly where that was appropriate, and I have used recent literary theory where that seemed useful, though my temperament is agnostic, and I am a non-believer and a non-belonger to schools of thought. I grew up in Dr Leavis's Cambridge, in an atmosphere of moral seriousness which placed English Literature at the centre of university studies and also of social morality. I felt then that these claims were extravagant and absurdly exclusive - all sorts of other things are good and beautiful, paint, philosophy, mathematics, biology - there are many ways of coming at inevitably partial visions of truth. I was and am excited by T.S. Eliot's observation that our literature is a substitute for religion, and so is our religion...

My interest in the novel as a form came later than my interest in poetry, and was partly a purely practical interest in narrative method. Two statements about the nature of fiction that influenced me very early were Iris Murdoch's 1961 essay 'Against Dryness' and a remark of Graham Greene's, in his essay on Mauriac, about the relationship between the religious sense, and the experienced reality, or irreality, of fiction. 'Against Dryness' is both a text about morality in a post-Christian world, and a text about the appropriate fictive form with which to explore that world, in its complexity and depth. It rejects what Blake might have called the single vision both of the crystalline novel, or jewel-like artefact, and of the journalistic report, and defends, on moral grounds, the Tolstoyan 'old-fashioned naturalistic idea of character'. Graham Greene argues that 'with the death of James the religious sense was lost to the English novel, and with the religious sense went the sense of the importance of the human act. It was as if the world of fiction had lost a dimension: the characters of such distinguished writers as Mrs Virginia Woolf and Mr E.M. Forster wandered like cardboard symbols through a world that was paper thin.'

The problems of the 'real' in fiction, and the adequacy of words to describe it, have preoccupied me for the last twenty years. If I have defended realism, or what I call 'self-conscious realism', it is not because I believe that it has any privileged relationship to truth, social or psychological, but because it leaves a place for thinking minds as well as feeling bodies. It is closely related to ideas of accuracy... (Byatt 1993: 2-4)

In the first essay of *Passions of the Mind*, 'Still Life / Nature morte', Byatt has this to say about her work on her novel *Still Life*:

I am afraid of, and fascinated by, theories of language as a self-referring system of signs, which doesn't touch the world. I am afraid of, and resistant to, artistic stances which say we explore our own subjectivity... I wanted at least to work on the assumption that order is more interesting than the idea of the random (even if our capacity to apprehend it is limited): that accuracy of description is possible and valuable. That words denote things. (Byatt 1993: 11)

In these passages Byatt steers a careful pathway through highly contested territory in order to claim a place for fictions which can fairly attempt to represent the moral life of real people in the real world. Her modest, agnostic, eclectic approach seems to me to be very appropriate in the current intellectual

context of postmodernity - indeed it could be described as politically strategic, but it would be presumptuous to accuse her of being more concerned with power than with truthfulness. It is, therefore, in this context that Byatt has written *Angels and Insects*, and that I read it. Clearly in these novellas she deals with contemporary as well as Victorian issues, in response to which she has presented an answer to the perennial questions which trouble reflective individuals and communities: How should we understand the world, and how therefore should we live in it? I do not think that she attempts to deconstruct the binary terms of the issues she raises in order to move beyond them (indeed, it remains doubtful that this will ever be possible). Nor does she completely resolve the conflicts, even though she seems, tentatively, to favour matter over spirit. Rather, she illustrates a way of living with uncertainty. At the end of both stories the main characters are able to go forward renewed in faith, hope and love in a universe which is ineluctably mysterious, and which inspires in them something akin to religious awe when they are able to gaze steadily at its terrors and delights without turning away to comforting and out-dated illusions. In this way Byatt offers her readers - who might certainly include senior secondary students - an analogy or model of how a postmodern ethics of disillusionment and re-enchantment might be put into practice. Conveniently for my purposes, it happens to be one which also draws on evolutionary and religious ideas.

A.S. Byatt tells the story of 'Morpho Eugenia' in the third person but restricts the narrative almost entirely to the point of view of William Adamson, an earnest young naturalist recently returned to England from field studies in the Amazon basin and left almost destitute by a shipwreck on the journey home. William sees fascinating opportunities in science for humans to achieve a better understanding of themselves, the world and their place in it. However, the Reverend Harald Alabaster, Baronet of Bredely Hall and William's benefactor, is not so enchanted. Harald is a collector of the curiosities sent home by naturalists, one of whom has been William. Early in the novella he invites William to stay and put his chaotic collection into some kind of scientific order, promising to reward him later by assisting him to return to his expeditions. The sorting proves to be an impossible task, for Harald has had no clear purpose in his collecting and so his random oddities seem, paradoxically, both capable of and resistant to any arbitrary arrangement. William, who is in the habit of drawing analogies, is quick to see this impossible task as like that 'of the prince

or princesses in the tales', (44)⁵⁴ but, of course, it is also like the task of the moral self in the postmodern condition, as students can be made aware.

On his first evening at Bredely Hall, William had danced with Eugenia, Harald's eldest daughter, and had fallen immediately in love with her. He sees himself now as the 'prince' who hopes to win the hand of the 'princess' Eugenia by fulfilling the task of restoring order which had been dictated by her father, who could be seen as representing the traditional Western patriarch. But William's futile sorting is also representative of a more important, and equally impossible task which Harald sets him. Harald is an aged, kindly, Anglican priest who is obsessed with writing a book - an 'impossible book' he calls it - 'which shall demonstrate - with some kind of intellectual respectability - that it is not impossible that the world is the work of a Creator, a Designer.' (33) He wants William, as a naturalist and rational thinker, to help him to clarify his thoughts as he attempts to rescue religion from the threat of science.

Byatt makes it clear that William arrived at Bredely Hall early in 1860, the year after Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species by Natural Selection*. Darwin's even more disturbing work, *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, was not published until 1871, but well before then many of the damaging implications of the earlier work for the traditional Christian view of the creation and nature of man had already been recognised. Byatt has both Harald and William refer to Darwin a number of times, and they accept his account of the origin of species as scientific truth. They could also have read Darwin's *Journal of Researches into the Natural History and Geology of Various Countries Visited by HMS 'Beagle'*, the first edition of which appeared in 1839, the second in 1845 - when William would have been 20 years old (see p. 10) - and the final, revised edition in 1860. Darwin had not been the first to propose the idea that the species were the result of a long process of evolution; rather his great contribution to science was to present a convincing case for the hypothesis that evolution occurred through the mechanism of natural selection, a mechanism which proceeds by accidental mutations within organisms. He also argued, less convincingly, that evolution has no teleological purpose, and therefore requires no direction and interference by a Creator or Designer.⁵⁵ Harald has grasped the full force of these ideas but wants to preserve his belief in a beneficent God by arguing that the intelligence of

⁵⁴ All page references, unless otherwise specified, are to the 1993 Vintage edition of *Angels and Insects*.

⁵⁵ One of the difficulties with Darwin's theory has been that it did not explain why more and more complex organisms should emerge. Complexity theory has recently suggested a solution to this problem through the mathematics of self-organising systems.

creatures - seen, for example, in the way beavers and bees design such intricate lodgings - reflects the intelligence of the Divine First Cause:

'Now, Darwin, in his passage on the *eye*, does seem, does he not, to allow the possibility of a Creator? He compares the perfecting of the eye to the perfecting of a telescope, and talks about the changes over the millennia to a thick layer of transparent tissue, with a nerve sensitive to light beneath, and goes on to remark that *if we compare the forces that form the eye to the human intellect "we must suppose that there is a power always intently watching each slight accidental alteration in the transparent layers."* Mr Darwin invites us to suppose that this intently watching power is inconceivable - that the force employed is blind necessity, the law of *matter*. But I say that in *matter* itself is contained a great *mystery* - how did it come to be at all - how does organisation take place - may we not after all come face to face in considering these things with the Ancient of Days..?' (35, 36)

William Paley's famous argument for the existence of God, based on the analogy between the way such things as the hand and the eye are fitted to their purposes and the way we know that watches and telescopes have been designed, had been well known in England since his book, *Evidence for the Existence and Attributes of the Deity*, had been published in 1802. Harald says that it was all very well for Paley to have used that argument then, but

'now we have an almost entirely satisfactory explanation - in the *gradual* action of Natural Selection, of slow change, over unimaginable millennia. And any argument that would truly seek to find an intelligent Creator in His works must take account of the beauty and force of these explanations, must not sneer at them, nor try to refute them for the sake of defending Him who cannot be defended by weak and *partial* reasonings...' (33)

William responds to this by declaring that he has been led by his observations 'to believe that we are all the products of the inexorable laws of the behaviour of matter.' (34) But then he adds:

'Whether I really believe this in my heart of hearts I do not know. I do not think that such a belief comes naturally to mankind. Indeed I would agree that the religious sense - in some form or another - is as much a part of the history of the development of mankind as the knowledge of cooking food, or the tabu against incest. And in this sense what my reason leads me to believe is constantly modified by my instincts.' (34)

Since its beginnings, science has apparently set reason against common beliefs (although, as Churchland shows, scientific methods actually extend commonsense thought processes). It is, for example, partly contrary to commonsense perceptions to maintain that the earth revolves around the sun. And so William, as a scientist, is not going to be much help to Harald who wants to argue that we instinctively believe in God because he exists.⁵⁶ Harald

⁵⁶ Harald later (87, 88) appeals to Tennyson's *In Memoriam* to support this view.

cannot accept the contrary view that we 'make God in our image, because we cannot do otherwise,' for, he says, 'It opens the path to a dark pit of horrors'. (34) But William's lack of faith comes partly from the fact that he thinks humans have made the God of hell-fire and damnation in their worst image. And in this, of course, William the scientist *is* influenced by his emotions.

Four of the central issues of the novella, and of Victorian thought, have emerged here. First, there is the difficulty of distinguishing between appearance and reality, for in science we learn that things are not always what they seem. Second - and related to the first issue - there is the problem of anthropomorphism: has Christianity, like paganism, constructed a god in man's own image? Later in the story we see that the problem of anthropomorphising the behaviour of insects comes to the fore as well. Third, there are the conflicting claims of materialism and religion. And fourth, there is the problem of reconciling reason with instinct: Harald is concerned to do this to save his faith, but for William the problem, as we shall see, has other ramifications, for he is caught between his desire to marry Eugenia and his desire to return to his studies in the Amazon, while his reason tells him that he does not need to marry. A fifth issue has arisen here as well, a central issue of modern and postmodern thought: can the discourses of art or science adequately express what we think we know?

Early in the story Byatt recapitulates William's development up to the point of his arrival at Bredely Hall and his first sight of the lovely Eugenia. She does this largely by giving an account of his journal writing, a habit which he adopted in his youth and which has perhaps made him a more acute observer of himself than of other people. (8, 9) The journals could be seen as introducing the post-structuralist idea of autobiography's pretence to discursive authority, or the allegedly spurious conviction of 'I say what I see', by which realism evades all the problems of the translating medium of language. Byatt, as we have seen, is aware of these problems, but does not take such a radical view. Thus it is partly through these journals that she has William find the means to embark upon his journey towards greatness as a naturalist, and to develop a more scientific view of life. He has been given a good schooling by his father who was a successful butcher and a devout Methodist. However, while he has gained much of value to his career as a natural historian from an education in Greek, Latin and elementary Mathematics, and from emulating his father's butchering skills, he has progressively rejected the fundamentalist and judgmental religion which was also part of his heritage, finding himself drawn along a pathway towards agnosticism similar to that of Charles Darwin. While he is still in England William's journals record that

...he had at first walked in a state of religious anxiety, combined with a reverence for Wordsworth's poetry, looking for signs of Divine Love and order in the meanest flowers that blew, in bubbling brooks and changing cloud formations... He wrote for a time in his journal of the wonders of divine Design, and his self-examination gave way insensibly to the recording of petals observed, leaf forms noted, marshes, hedges and tangled banks. His journal was for the first time alive with a purposeful happiness...

And then he discovered his ruling passion, the social insects... Here was the clue to the world. (10)

He writes a letter to the famous zoologist Henry Walter Bates and is encouraged to follow him out to Brazil. Later, during his travels in the Amazon, William

...scribbled descriptions of everything: the devouring hordes of army ants, the cries of frogs and alligators, the murderous designs of his crew...the unbalancing of his own soul in this green world of vast waste, murderous growth, and lazily aimless mere existence. He had peered into these pages by the light of burning turtle oil, and had recorded his solitude, his smallness in the face of the river and the forest, his determination to survive, whilst comparing himself to a dancing midge in a collecting bottle. (12)

Thus through his journals and letters home William comes 'to be addicted to the written form of his own language' (12) and uses it to help construct his understanding of life. His records show that (like Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*) he has lost his sense of divine design and providence in the jungle, but has gained the habit of comparing himself to the insects. This technique of trying to understand human life by drawing analogies with the lives of insects and other creatures is a central concern of the novella, and we can begin to see here how problematic it is.

Analogy is not a wholly linguistic device, since we can, for example, picture some analogies in paint and hear others in music, but it does require an elaborate signifying (or semiotic) system in which perceived similarities between things can be expressed. Recognising such similarities depends upon making generalisations, and hence analogy works by ignoring differences as well as finding likenesses. For this reason it offers a gain in meaning at the risk of a loss of knowledge. William, by comparing himself to a midge in the passage quoted above, realises his smallness in the face of the Amazon but ignores his superior intelligence and especially his unique ability to reflect upon his life by means of human language, a highly articulated symbolic system of representation which, in its written form, is particularly adapted to reflection. But why does William see himself as if caught in a collecting bottle? Is it just the vast, dense jungle which makes him feel trapped and observed? But hasn't he put himself in this situation? Or does he feel that his whole life is like this? Is he still subject to his old fears of an interfering and judgmental God? We are not told. Analogy, even if handled more circumspectly than this, is a slippery mode

of making meaning. Indeed, later Byatt depicts William as fully aware that analogies may be specious - he says as much to the Reverend Harald Alabaster, when they are discussing Harald's arguments for the existence of the Christian God:

'We have made our god by a specious analogy, Sir - I do not mean to give offence, but I have been thinking about this for some years - we make perfect images of ourselves, of our lives and fates, as the painters do of the Man of Sorrows, or the scene in the Stable, or as you once said, of a grave-faced winged Creature speaking to a young girl. And we worship these, as primitive peoples worship masks of terror, the alligator, the eagle, the anaconda. You may argue anything at all by analogy, Sir, and so consequently nothing. This is my view. Feuerbach understood something fundamental about our minds. We need loving kindness in *reality*; and often we do not find it - so we invent a divine Parent for the infant crying in the night, and convince ourselves all is well. In reality, many cries remain unheard in perpetuity.'

'That is not a refutation.'

'In the nature of the case, it cannot be. It leaves the matter exactly where it first stood. We desire things to be so, and so we create a tale, or a picture, that says, we are so and so. You might as well say, we are like ants, as that ants may develop to be like us.'

'Indeed I might. We are all one life, I believe, shot through with His love. I believe. I hope.'

He took his papers with careful hands in which the papers shivered...William watched the hands fold the wavering papers and was filled with pity for them, as for sick and dying creatures...

'It may be an emotional deficiency in myself, Sir, that I cannot feel the strength of the argument. I have been much changed by the pattern of my life, of my work. My own father was very much in the image of a terrible Judge, who preached rivers of blood and destruction, and whose own profession was bloody too. And then the vast disorder - the indifference to human scale and preoccupations - in the Amazon - I have not been left with a propensity to find kindness in the face of things.' (89, 90)

Perhaps Harald believes and hopes in the love of God partly because he is near death, and partly because he has been well provided for in life and is a kindly man who in turn wants to provide for William's welfare. On the other hand, William disbelieves because he is young and seeks freedom and happiness in rejecting his father's judgmental God and in pursuing his scientific passion. He has been disinherited by his father and he confronts the frightening face of life again in the mindless cruelty of the jungle. Thus for both men analogy becomes the tool of desire.

However, it may also be that Harald's analogies simply do not fit the observed facts of a wider experience of the world as well as William's do.⁵⁷ In this case analogy may become the tool of reason and offer a more accurate generalisation about the nature of reality. Whatever his motives - and in spite of

⁵⁷ Analogy is a variety of metaphor. The post-structuralist theorists Deleuze and Guattari (1987) argue that traditional metaphors inhibit exploratory thought. Their particular example is that the old arboreal metaphor for human development encodes a propensity to certain kinds of errors. They prefer the metaphor of the rhizome with its interconnected bulbous root system which throws up random shoots at what appear from the surface to be large distances from each other.

his warning to Harald about the dangers of analogy - exploring the notion that 'we are like ants' is just what Byatt has William do at length throughout her story. But with what success? Can analogy - and, by extension, all the linguistic artefacts in the novella: naming, word games, metaphors, parables, fables, allegories and sermons; and journals, letters and scientific observations recorded in natural histories (i.e. fiction and non-fiction) - avoid speciousness and advance our knowledge of the truth? Or do we, as William says, 'desire things to be so, and so...create a tale, or a picture, that says, we are so and so'? Post-structuralism, of course, answers this last question (hypocritically perhaps) by saying, yes, that is all we can ever do. Byatt, however, suggests, that maybe things are not quite as problematic as that.

Observations of insect and human behaviour are set side by side throughout the novella. Constantly both William and Harald draw implications for humanity from the behaviour of ants, bees and butterflies.⁵⁸ And William continues to reflect on both the necessity and danger of studying humans by drawing analogies between their behaviour and that of the insects. In his *Natural History*, which he is encouraged to write later in the story, he says:

We might also remark that the attitude of the human student is often coloured by what he would *wish* to believe, by his attitude to the Creation in general, that is, by a very general tendency to see every other thing, living and inanimate, in anthropomorphic terms. We wonder about the utility to men of living things, and one of the uses we make of them is to try to use them as magical mirrors to reflect back to us our own faces with a difference. We look in their societies for analogies to our own, for structures of command, and a language of communication. (109, 110)

Not only is our knowledge about insects limited, but also the understanding we gain from it about humans, on the basis of analogy, is tentative. Nevertheless, Byatt - like Churchland (1995) - seems to suggest in this novella that analogy makes possible a workable approach to truth by proposing plausible hypotheses which can be tested against future observations. At the very least analogies can make some of our earlier conceptions of human nature seem less tenable, just as Darwin's reflections on the origins of human behaviour, based on observation and analogies with animal behaviour, challenged the biblical account. In this

⁵⁸ On one occasion an unnatural, perhaps cruel, experiment is performed on the ants. This raises the moral difficulty of scientific investigation of animals and human beings by certain kinds of experimentation.

In the Summer, with scientific precision, William checked and elaborated his observations of the ant colonies, managing to observe the mating of the *sanguinea* this year, as well as that of the Wood Ants, which provided his *coup de théâtre*. He introduced into the glass nest of Wood Ants in the schoolroom two or three *sanguinea* Queens, presumably newly fertilised, which he had collected after their nuptial flight. (142)

way science advances by telling a kind of story which is drawn from experience, shaped by pre-conceived notions, and which proposes a model of life to be tested by further experience and by how well it fits in with other stories, both scientific and non-scientific. The project of science, therefore, is similar to those of art and religion:⁵⁹ each seeks to represent experience with some kind of accuracy. However, each at best falls short of the whole truth and at worst may be dangerously misleading. Certainly William thinks that Darwin gives a more truthful account of creation than does the book of 'Genesis'. Harald regretfully concedes that he may be right but is unwilling to relinquish the notion of Divine Providence. Must we therefore abandon all hope when we enter the Jungle of Natural Selection? Is there no beneficent Power in which we can place our trust? Byatt, I think, answers this question at the end of the story when William realises the full implications of the title of Matty Crompton's, fairy tale, 'Things Are Not What They Seem.' There is hope, and, as we shall see, it lies precisely in the paradox that neither scientific materialism, nor religion, nor art can tell us with absolute certainty how things really are, even as we use them to do so.

William's scientific cast of mind, and experience of environments and societies very different from those of England, give him a 'double vision' (7) of the almost feudal community of the country manor in which he has been offered refuge. He has both an 'inside' (subjective) and an 'outside' (objective) view of the workings of Bredely Hall. Furthermore his outsider's view is compounded by his middle class background and agnostic opinions. Nevertheless, as we have seen, he tries to integrate this unsettling double vision through his habit of drawing analogies and reflecting on them in his writings. Thus William Adamson is portrayed as the modern observer of a society which, from the reader's perspective in the late 20th century, could be seen as an outpost of the medieval world. In contrast to the inhabitants of this society, William represents a new kind of man - Scientific Man - and hence his name, Adamson: son of Adam, seems significant.

Indeed his name takes on a complex irony since he has just returned from the Amazon, which, from the point of view of England, seems analogous to the Garden of Eden with its endless tropical summer, profligate fruitfulness and naked inhabitants. Yet William knows the Amazon is in other respects a land of rampant violence, decay and death, and thus he can see it from both

⁵⁹ Art and religion, however, may have more in common with each other than they do with science, since scientists have developed communal self-correcting procedures which allow them to test the truth claims of their hypotheses experimentally.

points of view. To William, it is returning to England which more strongly represents Paradise Regained:

Since his ten years in the Amazon, and even more since his delirious days afloat in a lifeboat in the Atlantic, William had come to see clean, soft English beds as the heart of some earthly Bower of Bliss. (8)

While he was isolated in the jungles and writing his letters and journals, William kept himself in tune with his own language by reading and rereading, among other things, Milton's *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* (a work which Byatt, 1993: 3, says was 'the last *believed* - or believed without a large dose of riddling and qualifying fictionalising scepticism - Christian narrative in the language'). Not surprisingly, therefore, it is in England, and more particularly in the beautifully tended garden which is Bredely Hall, that William Adamson falls in love with and ultimately marries his supposed Eve, Eugenia Alabaster.

Early in the novella, while they are walking beside a stream and his love is as yet unspoken, William has the following conversation with Eugenia:

'How beautiful all this is,' she said. 'How *lucky* I always feel to live just here, of all spots on earth. To see the same flowers come out every spring in the meadows, and the same stream always running. I suppose it must seem a very *bounded* existence to you, with your experience of the world. But my roots go deep...'

'When I was in the Amazons,' he answered simply and truthfully, 'I was haunted by an image of an English meadow in spring - just as it is today, with the flowers, and the new grass, and the early blossom, and the little breeze lifting everything, and the earth smelling fresh after the rain. It seemed to me that such scenes were *truly* Paradise - that there was not anything on earth more beautiful than an English bank in flower, than an English mixed hedge, with roses and hawthorn, honeysuckle and bryony... Out there, no woman may touch a snake. They run to ask you to kill one for them. I have killed *many* snakes for frightened women. I have been fetched considerable distances to do so. The connection of the woman and the snake in the garden is made even out there, as though it is indeed part of some universal pattern of symbols, even where Genesis has never been heard of - I talk too much, I bore you, I am afraid.'

'Oh no. I am quite fascinated. I am glad to hear that our spring world in some sense remains your ideal. I want you to be happy here, Mr Adamson.'
(29 - 31)

It is one of the greatest ironies of the story that William Adamson, in spite of his loss of sexual innocence with the women of Brazil, turns out to be the morally innocent but gullible Adam in the English Garden of Eden; and that Eugenia, to whose blandishments he readily succumbs - though not without some misgivings - has already fallen to the temptations of its serpent, her half-brother Edgar, whom William finally has the power to scotch, but chooses not to. The climax of the novella occurs when William is mysteriously summoned back to the house from a ride and discovers Eugenia and Edgar committing incest. His

saviour, from what had already become a stultifying marriage and which is now a complete sham, is another outsider in the household, Matilda (Matty) Crompton. She has been engineering an escape for William and herself to the verdant but cruel realities of the Amazon, thus becoming both his 'good Fairy' (156) and his true Eve.

Hence William's analogising double vision, which controls the whole novella through the narrative point of view adopted by Byatt, and of which his Garden of Eden analogy is one example, is fully engaged, emotionally as well as intellectually, in the world of Bredely Hall, as it had also been in Brazil. He is both observer and participant - a position which Einstein's theory of relativity and quantum mechanics have now shown frustrates scientists' attempts to achieve completely objective knowledge - as Byatt makes clear in the following passages:

He guided [Eugenia] around the floor, and felt, to his amazement, unmistakable stirrings and quickenings of bodily excitement in himself. He shifted himself inside Lionel's dress suit, and reflected - he was after all a scientist and an observer - that these dances were designed to arouse his desire in exactly this way, however demure the gloves, however sweetly innocent the daily life of the young woman in his arms. He remembered the palm-wine dance, a swaying circle which at a change in rhythm broke up into hugging couples who then set upon and danced round the one partnerless scapegoat dancer. He remembered being grabbed and nuzzled and rubbed and cuddled with great vigour by women with brown breasts glistening with sweat and oil, and with shameless fingers.

Nothing he did now seemed to happen without this double vision of things seen and done otherwise, in another world. (6, 7)

Understanding daily life at Bredely Hall was not easy. William found himself at once detached anthropologist and fairytale prince trapped by invisible gates and silken bonds in an enchanted castle. (21)

William is presented as being aware of the problem yet at the same time helpless to extricate himself from the webs in which his sexual and social instincts are enmeshing him. Unless his capacity for reason triumphs over his emotions he is trapped:

He bowed politely to her, and thought at once of his drunken, clear-eyed journal entry, ' "I shall die if I cannot have her" ', and of a ship in flight, with the green water churning away from the bows, and the spray racing. He was not afraid of danger, but he was shrewd, and took no relish in the thought of shrivelling in a fruitless fire. (20)

The image of the ship in flight is one of the many dramatic ironies in this novella since it nicely foreshadows William's situation and mood in the final scene when he and Matty flee across the Atlantic. He does escape 'shrivelling in

a fruitless fire'⁶⁰ but not because he has succeeded by himself in maintaining his scientific, rational objectivity. Byatt's story would not be such a human and ethically interesting one if he had been so successful, for then the moral of that different story would have been humanly impossible to follow. As it is, the chief moral of the novella is encapsulated in Matty Crompton's fairy-tale-within-the-tale, which I will examine in detail later.

William Adamson's subjective/objective vision is not quite capable of saving him from his instincts, but at least his scientific detachment makes his salvation both necessary and possible. William has a passion for science and the clear-minded habit of revising his judgments following more accurate scientific observations. In the *Natural History* which Matty encouraged William to write, he says:

I retorted at the time that Réaumur claimed to have observed ants at play like ancient Greeks, indulging in wrestling bouts without harm, on sunny days. I have since, I must confess, several times observed what I believed to be this playful phenomenon, only to conclude on closer inspection, that what I was watching was not play, but war in earnest, fought, as ant wars usually are, for limited objectives and without wholesale berserker bloodlust. (115)

This modest approach, which tests hypotheses against further observations, allows William to produce a successful natural history for young readers, thus providing some of the independent finance needed for his escape. It also helps him to maintain sufficient detachment not to do something desperate when he discovers how he has been cheated by Eugenia and Edgar.

However, as we see in William's story, it is difficult - perhaps impossible - to gain sufficient knowledge from science to answer all our questions about the conditions of human life and how we should respond to them. Advances in scientific knowledge are hard-won and slow, and they require many researchers to work together in a communal inquiry. Also that inquiry should be well prepared to meet the problem of verifying genuine advances in what is, as Thomas Kuhn (1962) has argued, a form of knowledge which is partly socially constructed. Hence, just as Harald desperately needs William to help him write his 'impossible book' rescuing religion from science, so too does William need Matty to help him write his book of speculations on human nature based upon analogies drawn from their observations of ants. And Matty needs William to inspire her to write her fairy tale of renewed hope in the nature of things. The individual can achieve the good life, it seems, only by balancing instinct and reason with the help of a supportive and inquiring community. Thus Byatt

⁶⁰ On p. 87 Byatt has Harald quote a passage from Tennyson's *In Memoriam* which contains a similar phrase concerning the fate of a moth. Tennyson and Harald, unlike William, hoped that Divine Providence was at work even in such a fate.

implies that we need to acquire William's 'double vision', by adding to our subjective view of life the degree of objectivity gained through wider personal and vicarious experience - through travel, conversation and reading, and through the essentially communal disciplines of science and art, with their public discourses which open them up to reflection, critique and revision. There is even, as we shall see later, a place in this process for the perspectives of a form of religion which is also open to review.

So far I have been discussing Byatt's presentation of one of the key issues of my study: the problematic but still productive ways in which language refers to natural and social realities through the construction of analogies or models, and how these constructions can move from subjective towards more objective forms of knowledge - and towards closer approximations to (ultimately unattainable?) universal truths - as we begin to understand how other people construct and revise their models in response to their experiences. Now I turn to Byatt's treatment of the nature of the self which creates these constructions, particularly in the realm of social and moral knowledge. This is another of my central concerns, and one which could form a vital part of critical discussions of Byatt's novel in the classroom, since without a self which is capable of some degree of agency, and which can reflect on the conditions of its life in languages that refer reasonably accurately to those conditions, there can be no useful discussion of ethical issues.

Byatt portrays William as writing a book of natural history in which he explores the nature of, and relationships between, instinct and intelligence, design and chance, and the individual and society. (109) He pursues these musings through observing the behaviour of ants and hypothesising tentative explanations for their behaviour by drawing analogies with human societies. Here William shows that he is aware that these analogies are strongly influenced by current social conditions:

In the past both ants and bees have been thought to have kings, generals and armies. Now we know better,⁶¹ and describe the female worker-ants as slaves, nurses, nuns or factory operatives, as we choose. Those of us who conclude that the insects have no language, no capacity to think, no 'intelligence', but only 'instinct' tend to describe their actions as those of automata, which we picture as little mechanical inventions whirring about like clockwork set in motion. (110)

⁶¹ Byatt's use of the word 'better' here as part of William's scientific/philosophical discourse is perhaps indicative of his patriarchal assumptions and ironic in the light of his later rescue by Matty, a female 'slave' in the household, from a form of slavery which his new role as a literal patriarch has imposed on him.

Yet William tries to find plausible answers to his questions, and, although he feels that he has argued around and around in his book, he clearly favours the Darwinian view that the chance processes of mutation and natural selection have endowed insects and other creatures with inherited aptitudes which amount to intelligence - in other words, problem solving abilities which modify behaviours that are otherwise instinctive or unconscious. William also wonders whether this intelligence, in the case of the social insects, resides more in the individual or the group. He observes that the ants' nest seems to display a fine ability to adapt its workings to changing circumstances:

The intelligence that directs the activities of the founding Queen, or those of the mature worker, is the intelligence of the City itself, of the conglomerate which cares for the wellbeing of the whole, and continues its life, in time and space, so that the community is infinite and eternal, even if both Queens and workers are mortal. (112)

Elsewhere William describes this controlling intelligence as 'the Spirit of the Nest'. (40) However, he notes that there are some ants who are more active and adventurous than others and he wants to see them as individuals motivated by personal desires. Yet he has observed that their whole natures can be changed by altering their circumstances:

Shake up a dozen ants, in a test tube, and they will fall on each other and fight furiously. Separate a worker from the community, and she will turn in aimless circles, or crouch morosely in a coma and wait to die... (113)

Applying these reflections to human life, William concludes:

The terrible idea - terrible to some, terrible, perhaps, to all, at some time or in some form - that we are *biologically predestined* like other creatures, that we differ from them only in inventiveness and the capacity for reflection on our fate - treads softly behind the arrogant judgement that makes of the ant a twitching automaton. (113)

William wants to see both ants and humans as biologically and socially constructed, and at the same time as intelligent individuals who are able to exercise some degree of choice. He also rejects the notion that the social instinct in humans tends to be elaborated into more and more repressive political systems. He cites the benevolent social experiments of Robert Owen, in which individuals were to some extent reconstructed or 'improved' by placing them in a good environment, giving them some individual responsibility and offering them an individual education. Byatt has the famous natural historian, Alfred Wallace, comment thus on these experiments in a letter to William:

'Heredity, through which it is now known that ancestral characteristics are continually reappearing, gives that infinite diversity of character which is the very salt of social life; by environment, including education, we can so modify and improve the character as to bring it into harmony with the possessor's actual surroundings, and thus fit him for performing some useful and enjoyable function in the great social organisation.' (115)

All these arguments are, of course, familiar to modern readers - and could certainly be introduced to students - in terms such as 'nature versus nurture', and 'free-will versus determinism'. Usually they are resolved by acknowledging that both concepts in each pair apply. However, William remains uncertain that he has any freedom of choice at all. Indeed, as we shall see, he feels trapped by his social circumstances and driven by his instincts, until late in the novella when he finally breaks free to resume his scientific studies in the Amazon.

Thus, in constructing her characters and plot, Byatt clearly comes down in favour of a degree of individual human agency - influenced, of course, by texts and communication as much as by other experiences and proclivities. And with good reason since, as I have indicated, the recent work of evolutionary epistemologists, sociobiologists and neuro-scientists, building on Darwin's far-reaching application of the theory of natural selection, supports the notions that language does refer to the world through the construction and modification of models or prototypes in response to experience, and that the biologically and discursively constructed self does have the capacity to exercise a degree of agency. Natural selection has produced in ants and humans an instinctive capacity to respond to many different circumstances, perhaps through a variety of parallel processes and sub-routines within the overall program of the brain. These are sufficiently complex to give even ants with their tiny brains the ability to respond in a way which we recognise as intelligent, even creative. This capacity for problem-solving works at all levels in their society, from the individual to the group, since ants communicate, according to the biologist E.O. Wilson's (1976) research, by an elaborate chemical code.

Part of their 'hard-wiring', through natural selection, has programmed ants and other social animals to behave in an altruistic manner, since such behaviour is selected by its survival value to the genes of the individuals within the group. The mechanism of this selection has been plausibly hypothesised by sociobiologists and evolutionary psychologists. Thus we can speak accurately of ants behaving in a moral (i.e. altruistic) way and even of solving problems by using creative intelligence (the neural processing mechanism of which has been hypothesised by Churchland, 1995). However, it would be going too far to say that individuals or groups of ants exercise ethical judgement, that is if morality is defined as the codes of conduct specific to a particular social group, and

ethics as the practice of reasoning in more general (i.e. philosophical) terms about the foundation, construction and application of moral principles and prototypes. It is unlikely that creatures which do not possess such highly developed languages as humans do would have the ability to reflect consciously on their moral decisions. In all probability they respond to challenges to themselves and their society by processing them in individual neural networks which operate in the same unconscious ways which characterise many of the processes of the human brain. Some of the prototypical behaviour patterns which lower creatures apply to these problems would have been genetically determined, others would have been learned as the creature was socialised within the group, and still others would be formed as the individual unconsciously processed new data from its experience and communicated this learning to the group by demonstrating a modified behaviour pattern. Humans, of course, have the capacity, conferred by the concepts and relationships enshrined in their highly complex languages, to signify to themselves and to each other their understanding of their natural and social worlds and of passing on this knowledge to their descendants, who must in turn modify it in response to new circumstances. Thus we have the ability to be self-conscious, to reflect on our feelings, thoughts and actions, to project possible ways of acting in the future and to choose between them. We are able, therefore, to exercise varying degrees of free will, ethical judgement and agency.

Matty Crompton, as we shall see, exercises a greater degree of agency than does William. When they are discussing William's book she asks him if there will one day be people who will be happy to live and die for the group without expecting a reward in an after-life. William says that such people already exist, although he also supposes that there are many important facts of which he is ignorant in his picture of the world. (117) Indeed, it is true that many people have felt the need to be motivated by a belief in something greater than themselves to which their mortal lives can contribute. Some, like Zohar and Marshall, have found in the evolutionary process, working in part through the social animals, this sense of a transcendent meaning to their individual existences. As self-conscious beings (or becomings) they therefore choose on rational grounds to add to their limited altruistic instincts a further altruistic purpose, partly by cooperating with, and partly by working against the processes which seem to govern the universe, and so contribute to the evolution of more complex states of consciousness and the creation of more benevolent societies. For on the one hand, although nature is not necessarily teleological, it does seem to be finely tuned to bring about the emergence of more and more complex life forms, as Wilson (1994) and Kauffman (1995) have claimed. On

the other hand, the process of evolution is not in itself benevolent - far from it, in fact - even though it has produced social animals which possess some altruistic motives. Nevertheless, reflective people can choose to make life better for their fellows, even the weak and lowly, and so reshape the conditions of life which evolution and social history have produced. William and even more so Matty certainly have a greater degree of awareness of themselves and their natural and social circumstances than do any of the Alabasters, including Harald. They are enabled by this awareness to break out of the medieval, perhaps more instinctive, patterns of life at Bredely Hall, and to embark on a very modern - indeed, as I shall show, postmodern - journey of discovery, a journey which is scientific, literary, religious and ethical.

Eugenia Alabaster provides an interesting case of someone who possesses a kind of double vision together with a tragically limited degree of agency. If these capacities are not exactly the same as William's, at least they *almost* get her what both conventional morality and her particular instincts dictate: a socially acceptable marriage *and* an incestuous relationship. Also Edgar, her half brother by Harald Alabaster's first wife, certainly knows something which William does not, but he is presented as driven by instincts which he satisfies through animal cunning. Eugenia and Edgar live together with their father and her mother; with Edgar's full brother, Lionel, and Eugenia's numerous younger full siblings; and with a nanny, tutors (one of whom is Matty) and myriads of servants in the household of Bredely Hall, which is likened in many and various ways to a colony of insects. For example Eugenia is compared by William, and by her 'fortuitous' name, to a female specimen of a butterfly known scientifically as *Morpho Eugenia*. William promises at Eugenia's request to procure a cloud of butterflies for her, in which, he says,

'You would be *Morpho Eugenia*. It means beautiful, you know. Shapely.'

'Ah,' said Eugenia. 'The opposite of amorphous.'

'Exactly. The primeval forest out there - the endless sameness of the greenery - the clouds of midges and mosquitoes - the struggling mass of creepers and undergrowth - often seemed to me the epitome of the amorphous. And then something perfect and beautifully formed would come into view and take the breath away. *Morpho Eugenia* did that, Miss Alabaster.' (21)

But William has not yet been reminded by Matty that things are not what they seem, and he has forgotten that he himself has just been telling Harald about the butterflies which feed on poisonous plants and 'seem to know that they may flaunt themselves with impunity, that predators will not snap them up'. (20) However, Eugenia does know that she is not the virginal creature William

thinks she is and yet she demurely offers herself to him.⁶² William cannot believe his good fortune when he finally discovers that, in spite of his lower social status and lack of means, she will be his wife. This feeling is only intensified on their wedding night:

'Oh,' he said, in the warmth and the wet, 'you are honey, you are so sweet, my dearest.' He heard a strange chuckle, something like laughing and weeping together, in her throat. He thought of the mysteries of knowledge, of what men and women, no less than the creatures, could do if they followed their instinct, unafraid. She was darting her hot face, the cold white Eugenia, into his neck, and kissing him repeatedly where his vein pulsed. Her fingers were wound in his hair, her legs were wound in his, and this was Eugenia, of whom he had said he would die, if he could not have her. (68)

Naturally, in the heat of the moment, William's considerable ability to reflect on what is happening to him - his double vision - does not quite extend to wondering about that strange, ambiguous chuckle, or to asking if Eugenia's sexual knowledge perhaps owes more to experience than to instinct.

Immediately following this scene Byatt, as narrator, stands back a little from William's point of view and makes this comment on his situation, a comment which not only suggests that the kind of story she is telling is both fairytale and pseudo-realist novel but that William's expectations, like those of many people, have been coloured by fictional conventions of genre:

And so he lived happily ever after? Between the end of the fairy story with its bridal triumph, between the end of the novel, with its hard-won moral vision, and the brief glimpse of death and due succession, lies a placid and peaceful pseudo-eternity of harmony, of increasing affection and budding and crowing babes, of ripe orchards and heavy-headed cornfields, gathered on hot nights. William, like most human beings, expected this in some quiet corner of his emotions, and, although he would not have said so, if asked, he would have been properly cautious about the unknown future. (69)

Clearly this is not the end of William's story - indeed it is less than half way through and the 'happily ever after' ending must come much later. Any illusions William may have had about his marriage are gradually dispelled. First, he discovers that Eugenia's bedroom door is open to him only during the brief time it takes her to get pregnant. Next, the children she bears all have the unmistakable Alabaster stamp and look nothing like him. Then he realises that he is trapped by his responsibility for his new family and must postpone indefinitely his return to the Amazon. He also has to continue to face the disdain which Edgar has barely concealed from him ever since he came to the house.

⁶² Later Eugenia does show some hesitation in offering herself to William, due apparently to her feeling that no-one would have her after her tragic rejection by her fiancée who had committed suicide. (47) However, in the light of subsequent events (54, 55) it is possible to see her as knowingly playing upon William's sympathies.

William, not having 'entirely thrown off his father's censorious religion', (61) does not approve of Edgar either, since he gambles, drinks, rides his horses cruelly, and womanises. Of course, given his own sexual liaisons in Brazil, William is aware that he is being somewhat hypocritical in judging Edgar's conduct in this last matter. Still, Edgar is selfish and brutal, and provides a stark contrast to William's thoughtfulness and kindness. Moreover, William has proved through his expeditions in the jungle and his survival at sea that he has at least as much courage and endurance as Edgar. However, William is enabled to cope with all these disappointments by his innocent conspiracy with Matty, who has encouraged him to take up the study of the local natural history and to write his book about it. As he does this though, he often reflects on the tentative analogy between his role in Bredely Hall and that of a male ant in the Wood Ants' nest:

'Analogy is a slippery tool,' said William. 'Men are not ants.'

Nevertheless, in the hot days just after Midsummer, when they increased their vigilance in order to observe, if possible, the nuptial flight of the Queens and their suitors, he was hard put to it not to see his own life in terms of a diminishing analogy with the tiny creatures. He had worked so hard, watching, counting, dissecting, tracking, that his dreams were pricking with twitching antennae, advancing armies, gnashing mandibles and dark, inscrutable complex eyes. His vision of his own biological processes - his frenzied, delicious mating, so abruptly terminated, his consumption of the regular meals prepared by the darkly quiet forces behind the baize doors, the very regularity of his watching, dictated by the regularity of the rhythms of the nest, brought him insensibly to see himself as a kind of complex sum of his nerve-cells and instinctive desires, his automatic social responses of deference or required kindness or paternal affection. *One* ant in an anthill was neither here nor there, was dispensable, was nothing. (100)

Finally the last shred of illusion about his marriage is torn away when William sees Eugenia and Edgar in the moment after their sexual intercourse. At the centre of this feudal household, which Byatt has made to appear more and more like an ants' or bees' nest, is a long-standing practice of incest. After the initial shock of revulsion, William feels 'humiliated, and simultaneously... hugely empowered'. (149) Edgar especially is now under his control but ultimately all William really wants is to be free from this world in which his life had become merely that of a drone. Clearly, even Eugenia's children were not his, though she says she had been careful not to know who the father was.

Eugenia's response to being discovered is interesting. She certainly displays a sense of guilt. She admits to having complied with Edgar since she was very little when it began, she says, as a game. But she knew it had to be kept secret 'like other things you must not do, and do. Like touching yourself in the dark'. (150) She had been engaged before to a Captain Hunt but he had become suspicious that all was not well and it had preyed on his mind. She tried

to stop relations with Edgar and to persuade her fiancée that he had been mistaken. She realised then how terrible her behaviour seemed to others, but, she says,

' - we could not stop. I do not think - he - ' she choked on Edgar's name, 'meant to stop - he - he is - *strong* and of course Captain Hunt - someone led him to see - he saw - not *much* - but enough. And he wrote a terrible letter - to - to both of us - and said - oh - ' she began to weep rapidly suddenly, 'he could not live with the knowledge even if *we* could. That is what he said. And then he shot himself. In his desk there was a note, to me, saying I would know why he had died, and that he hoped I would be able to be happy.'

William watched her weep.

'But even after that - you went on.'

'Who else could I turn to?'

She went on weeping. William looked back over his life. He said, 'You turned to me. Or made use of me anyway.' (151)

Eugenia is to some extent just another victim of Edgar's sexual deceptions, and yet she has gone on knowingly, making use of William in the process. Her duplicity (not at all the same thing as William's double vision) has been revealed, and hence William, set free from her sexual spell, now also feels free to leave her forever and pursue his scientific career. He visits Eugenia one last time before he goes, conducting himself with impeccable reasonableness⁶³ and magnanimity. She asks him if he will tell on her, and he replies:

'Who can I tell, Eugenia, whom I should not destroy in the telling? You must live with yourself, that is all I can say, you must live with yourself as you can.' (159)

By this point in the novella Byatt has let Harald Alabaster slip from view. Indeed, we are never told how William makes his excuses to his elderly benefactor for abandoning wife and children and returning to the Amazon, this time with Matty as a companion. Perhaps Byatt did not see how such a scene might be plausibly managed. However, here we see that she has William wishing to spare Harald's feelings from the pain of a potentially devastating disillusionment about the relationship between his son and daughter. Thus William, like Marlow in *Heart of Darkness*, prevaricates - at least by his silence - for the sake of one whom he judges will be better off not knowing the whole truth in this instance. But, unlike Marlow, there is no additional pretence that the survival of civilisation depends upon keeping a whole class of people in the

⁶³ Reasonableness could perhaps be considered one of the humane virtues. It is another example of what Bernard Williams (1985: 129) calls 'thick concepts'. In what follows I demonstrate from William Adamson's behaviour what I mean by reasonableness and hence how it might be considered to differ from that sort of rationality which is only concerned with logic. Briefly, the reasonable person is both guided by his own judgements based on a wide variety of relevant considerations, including emotional ones, and is open to being reasoned with by others.

dark - or perhaps I should say, with the final scene of *Heart of Darkness* in mind, bathed in a golden but ominously fading glow of illusion.

Continuing their final interview, Eugenia replies to William's reproach:

'I *know* it was bad, said Eugenia. 'I know it was bad, but you must understand it didn't *feel* bad - it grew little by little, out of perfectly innocent, natural, *playful* things - which no one thought wrong - I have never been able to speak to any other living soul of it, you must forgive me for speaking to you - I can see I have made you angry, though I tried to make you love me - if I could have spoken to anyone, I might have been brought to see how wrong it was. But - *he* thought it wasn't - he said - people like making rules and others like breaking them - he made me believe it was all perfectly *natural* and so it was, it was *natural*, nothing in us rose up and said - it was - unnatural.'

'Breeders know,' said William curtly, 'that even first-cousin marriages produce inherited defects - increase the likelihood -'

Eugenia cast down her lashes. 'That is a cruel thing to say.' (159)

William has of course only spoken rationally, enunciating a fact which animal breeders have learnt from experience. However, Eugenia does not think at this level. She knows, as Edgar does, that conventional morality condemns incest, but she feels more deeply that it was 'natural'. This raises the question of what is 'natural' in human behaviour. Is incest natural? Are taboos natural? Is morality natural? Are laws natural? Certainly the activity of breeders is not, since they practise *artificial* selection, a technique which had been known for a very long time before Darwin proposed that evolution works by natural selection. Biologists have shown that incest tends to be avoided in ape societies, and anthropologists have found that all human groups have some form of incest taboo, although it was not so clear why until sociobiologists proposed a plausible explanation. (Gribbin 1993: 267-269) It is reasonable to suppose that the taboo is based at least partly on an instinct which has been naturally selected for its value to the survival of the species. Yet incest does occur among both apes and humans since the characteristics of any species are distributed across a certain range. If that were not so, the process of natural selection of those particular characteristics which enhance survival could not occur. Instinct, therefore, is only sometimes in harmony with what intelligence dictates in this matter, and not enough to prevent some inbreeding. William has known this all along and also that noble families like the Alabasters 'are supported by inbreeding of stock'. (14) He had made this observation in his journal when he first came to Bredely Hall and was considering his prospects of marrying Eugenia. He also wrote:

- I am as good a *man*, take me for all in all, as E. A. [Edgar Alabaster] and have, I dare swear it, used my intelligence and my bodily courage to greater purpose. But how would that consideration weigh with any such family, constructed exactly to reject any such intr... [sic]

The only rational course is to forget the whole matter, suppress these inopportune feelings, make an end. (14)

What a pity William had not followed his intellect rather than his instinct from the beginning - but then he would not have been a normal human being, and he would not have met Matty or learned her useful moral lesson. Neither, of course, would we have had the full benefit of Byatt's complex ethical fiction.

Conventional morality enshrines an amalgam of instinctive taboos and past ethical reasoning, but it is not an adequate guide to every new situation. Reason must be applied over and over again, and by reason I mean not just cold logic but also consideration of feelings and consequences. This is how ethics differs from morality. William illustrates this difference in his final dealings with Eugenia, for he has had time to consider the situation and he chooses not to condemn either Eugenia or Edgar merely on the basis of conventional morality. His final judgement of their incestuous behaviour is a rational one based only on the science of good breeding (i.e. *eugenics* - in this respect too Eugenia's name belies what she seemed) and in this way it exemplifies Robert Wright's view that an understanding of the biological determinations of so much human behaviour should teach us to be more tolerant. William had felt a momentary impulse to kill Edgar, but then it seems to him that Edgar has become 'in some ways less simply hateful, in this hellish plight. He was more driven, less complacently, ordinarily brutal and overbearing than he had seemed'. (154) To judge Edgar, as he is simplistically portrayed in the novella, by conventional morality might have seemed to William like holding a horse morally responsible for its actions. Furthermore, William tells Matty, "Retribution is not my business. I will - I will ask Edgar for money, for Amy - I do not care how that may appear, I will ensure that Amy has an income for life - and then I will go". (155) Amy is a servant girl who had assisted William and Matty in their study of the ants, and whom Edgar had impregnated. William had hesitated to help her previously when he confronted Edgar over the matter. Edgar had warned him that others would misconstrue William's concern for her, but William no longer cares what the society of Bredely Hall thinks of him and sees only the little bit of good he might do to improve the lot of one who is weak and of low social status.

In his last moments with Eugenia, William observes her

...clasping her own hands nervously in her lap. She had the curtains half-drawn against the sunlight and to hide the shadows of her tearstains. She was lovely, and complacent, and amoral, and he sensed that she was now waiting for him to go, so she could resume her self-nurture and self-communion. At some level, what had happened was *inconvenient* to Eugenia, and he was about to remove the inconvenience, himself. He said, 'Morpho Eugenia. You are very lovely -'

'It has not done me good,' said Eugenia, 'to look pretty, to be admired. I would like to be different.'
But William could not take that seriously, as he watched her compose her mouth, and open wide her eyes, and look hopefully up at him.
'Goodbye, Eugenia. I shall not come back.'
'You never know, she replied vaguely, her attention already sliding away from him, with a pretty little sigh of relief. (159)

William is now better informed and no longer so driven by emotion. Through experience he has become a much better judge of other people than he was when he first came to Bredely Hall, and he judges Eugenia to be amoral. This is perhaps a generous interpretation of her behaviour, but on the other hand she is a victim in a patriarchal society. At the same time she has been portrayed throughout the novella as a butterfly, and an ant queen - creatures of instinct, of a certain intelligence, and of a conventional altruism, but not sufficiently rational to make ethical judgements.

That degree of rationality needs the kind of self-consciousness and objectivity afforded only by wide experience and a highly developed language. Even then it will help to have a facility with the particularly reflective form of language which is writing, especially in the form of literature and moral philosophy. At this level of human development the analogy between humans and animals breaks down. But, for whatever reasons, it is certain that some humans, like the hedonistic Edgar, do not possess the capacity, or perhaps the desire, for this kind of ethical development. Even in a democratic society we might agree that an intrusive attempt should be made to adequately socialise such people - perhaps because we decide on rational grounds that it is in their best interests as well as in the interests of the present and future flourishing of our species of social animal. If so, we might be justified in the nurture, training and discipline of whatever social instincts they possess, by parents, teachers and other agencies. And ultimately we might be justified in restraining those who still do not comply with our codes of conduct. But how far should we go in this process of intervention in the lives of others without being guilty of gross indoctrination or worse - in other words, without being guilty of Fascism? This path has already been trodden to its most terrifying limits by the Nazis who have demonstrated that the Enlightenment ideal of rationalism has, like medieval Christianity, its darker side.

It is certain too that other people who do have the intellectual capacity and the desire for ethical reflection have not been adequately educated to be able to make autonomous moral judgements. Eugenia, for example, shows signs of having once been educable, and even William, in spite of his double vision and his residue of Christian compassion, still had some learning to do. In particular Byatt shows that, through a wealth of experiences, William has

enlarged his moral imagination and his capacity to govern instinct by understanding - and she has done this in her novella for the amusement and ethical instruction of her readers.

If William Adamson represents the new scientific man - a modern creation - Matty represents a new type of woman, one who was certainly present in the nineteenth century (in such shining examples as George Eliot) and indeed in every age, but who comes into her own in the late twentieth century with the many successes of feminism. She is, perhaps, a postmodern phenomenon. Regrettably, what Matty exemplifies is still for many Western women an unachievable ideal, a creation of fairytale, although many more women are now in a position to emulate her.

Matty has had an excellent education, as William is obliged to acknowledge:

'I am amazed at your accomplishments. Latin, Greek, draughtsmanship of a high quality, a thorough knowledge of English Literature.'

'I was educated with my betters, in the schoolroom of a Bishop. My father was the tutor and the Bishop's lady was kindly-intentioned.' (118)

Furthermore she has made intelligent use of her opportunities and has gone on educating herself through voracious reading. And although she can quote extensively from the poets, hers is not simply rote learning: she understands, for example, that more complex ethical issues lie beneath the surface of conventional moral sentiments, as this contribution by Matty to a discussion of slavery among ants and humans shows:

'But if we call the beehive Pandemonium, what name shall we give to the home of the Blood-red slave-makers?'

'It is a horrible trade,' said Miss Mead, with unexpected vehemence. 'I have never wept so much over a book as I wept over *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. I pray nightly for the cause of President Lincoln.'

The first shots had been fired in the war between the states. Opinions were divided in Bredely about the issue - much of the family money came from the Lancashire cotton trade - which was therefore not on the whole discussed...

'We might call [the Blood-red Ants' nest] Athens with perfect justice,' said Miss Crompton, 'since the Greek civilisation we so much admire was founded on slavery, and I daresay could not have shone so brightly without it...' (80, 81)

Byatt portrays Matty as determined to make good use of the opportunity for inquiring into natural history afforded by William's presence in the house, but not only for the sake of her own education and that of the children: apparently she also sees her chance to free herself from dependency on the Reverend Alabaster and satisfy her hunger for wider experiences of life. It is hard to escape the conclusion, which William also comes to suspect, that she

has foreseen the crisis in William's marriage and has been positioning both of them to take advantage of it from the beginning. She is not entirely selfish in this either, since she perceives that William's coming into her life is one of those happy 'accidents' in which the interests of both parties coincide exactly. Indeed, the ultimate goal of ethical behaviour might be to achieve just such an ideal outcome. Certainly evolutionary ethics supports this view, and even Jesus' Sermon on the Mount seems to recognise as much in his commandments to 'love your neighbour as yourself' and 'give and it will be given unto you'. However, achieving this end often requires that we put at risk our own interests in focusing on the good of the other. This is precisely what Byatt has Matty do, creating in the process an engagingly suspenseful plot.

Of course the truth of Jesus' promise that our giving will be rewarded ultimately depends on there being a just and providential God who evens up the score sooner or later. William does not believe that this God exists, having rejected any such idea when he unburdened himself of his father's particularly frightening theology. Yet Matty in the end seems certain that there is some sort of beneficent Design or Fate in the universe which especially helps those who help themselves. Ironically this notion is not far removed from the deism which Harald seems to be left with after all his painful deliberations. But while Harald and William's beliefs are characterised more or less by disillusionment and loss of faith, Matty's have the quality of rediscovering enchantment, belief and hope in the world. Particularly apposite here is this lengthy exchange between Harald and William in which they are struggling together to find some vestige of meaning in life:

'But do you not feel your own sense of wonder corresponds to something *beyond* yourself, William?'

'I do indeed. But I also ask myself, what has this sense of wonder to do with my moral sense? For the Creation we so admire does not appear to have a Creator who cares for his creatures. Nature *is* red in tooth and claw, as Mr Tennyson put it. The Amazon jungle does indeed arouse a sense of wonder at its abundance and luxuriance. But there is a spirit there - a terrible spirit of *mindless striving* or apathetic inertia - a kind of vegetable greed and vast decay - which makes a mindless natural force much easier to believe in...

'The world has changed so much, William, in my lifetime. I am old enough to have believed in our First Parents in Paradise, as a little boy, to have believed in Satan hidden in the snake, and in the Archangel with the flaming sword, closing the gates. I am old enough to have believed *without question* in the Divine Birth on a cold night with the sky full of singing angels and the shepherds staring up in wonder, and the strange kings advancing across the sand on camels with gifts. And now I am presented with a world in which we are what we are because of the mutations of soft jelly and calceous bone matter through unimaginable millennia - a world in which angels and devils do not battle in the Heavens for virtue and vice, but in which we eat and are eaten and absorbed into other flesh and blood. All the music and painting, all the poetry and power is so much illusion. I shall moulder like a mushroom when my time comes, which is not long. It is likely that the injunction to love each other is no more than the prudent instinct of sociability, of parental protectiveness, in a creature related to a great ape. I used to love to see paintings of the

Annunciation - the angel with his wings dipped in the rainbow, of which the butterfly and bird of Paradise were poor, imperfect echoes, holding the white and gold lily and going down on his knee to the thoughtful young girl who was about to be the Mother of God, love made flesh, knowledge given to us, or lent. And now all that is as it were erased, and there is a black backcloth on an empty stage, and I see a chimpanzee, with puzzled eyes and a hanging brow and great ugly teeth, clutching its hairy offspring to its wrinkled breast - and is *this* love made flesh?

'I know my answer - it *is* - if God works at all he works in the ape towards Man - but I cannot measure my loss, it is the pit of despair itself. I began my life as a small boy whose every action was burned into the gold record of his good and evil deeds, where it would be weighed and looked over by One with merciful eyes, to whom I was walking, step by unsteady step. I end it like a skeleton leaf, to be made humus, like a mouse crunched by an owl, like a beef-calf going to the slaughter, through a gate which opens only one way, to blood and dust and destruction. And then, I think, no brute beast could have such thoughts. No frog, no hound even, could have a vision of the Angel of Annunciation. *Where does it all come from?*'

'It is a mystery. Mystery may be another name for God. It has been well argued that mystery is another name for matter - we *are* and have access to Mind, but Matter is mysterious in its very nature, however we choose to analyse the laws of its metamorphoses. The laws of the transformation of Matter do not explain it away.'

'Now you argue on my side. And yet I feel, all these arguments are *nothing*, the motions of minds that are not equipped to carry them through.'

'And there too is hope, as well as dread. Where do *they* come from, our minds?' (60)

Byatt has set this deeply moving discussion in the nineteenth century, but its force can be felt equally by many people today. The world is rapidly changing; past certainties have been unsettled; contradictions and dilemmas abound. Religious belief is declining in some communities while fundamentalism is growing alarmingly in others. The laws of the transformation of matter have been expressed even more mysteriously in the terms of quantum mechanics which seem to run completely counter to common sense. The planet is being laid waste by technologies which have also brought much good. Societies are being shattered by individualism and resurgent nationalism whilst their economies are increasingly being globalised. The full moral implications of Darwinism are only now being articulated by philosophers such as James Rachels (1990) and Peter Singer (1994) in an ethics which offers a more humane approach to abortion and euthanasia by dispensing, perhaps dangerously, with illusions of a unique human dignity. What are we to make of these and many other disturbing developments? How can we judge between better and worse in such a world? Are we not desperately in need of a renewed sense of wonder which corresponds to something *beyond* ourselves, some transcendent 'Truth' which would unite the peoples of the earth in one faith and on which we could found a universal moral code? Of course we are unlikely to agree upon such a 'Truth', and, judging by the history of past pretenders, we may be better off without the attempt to define it. Matty, in Byatt's ethically

complex fiction, offers a more modest truth to live by, a maxim whose virtue lies in the paradox that it encourages both belief and disbelief at the same time: 'Things Are Not What They Seem.'

This negative statement could be the catch-cry of postmodern scepticism. It would certainly not qualify for Kant as a categorical imperative upon which to found the whole of morality. But is it a truth, a principle, which can enhance human flourishing? The answer is yes, because only if we live by it will we make progress along the pathway of successive disillusionments and re-enchantments towards whatever immanent truths we can construct or discover - and it will warn us against Fascist tendencies of judging too harshly those who, for the time being, hold to truths different from ours. The idea that things are not what they seem also encourages a sense of wonder at the ineffability of the universe, that variety of religious awe which William experienced when he felt his mind dwarfed by the vastness and complexity of things in the Amazonian forests. It runs counter to the religious wonder, a type of aesthetic sense, which Harald felt when the meaning of life was fully explained to him in simple Bible stories and an intricately beautiful Catholic theology - yet one cannot help but feel that the attempt at such explanations has its place too, in spite of its dark side. (Perhaps, too, there is something in Harald's sense of wonder which is similar to Kant's rationalist 'feeling' of respect for the Law.) Apparently, living by the maxim that things are not what they seem requires full command of William's double vision, the finest balancing of all manner of binary oppositions, some of which form the themes of this novella: objectivity-subjectivity; belief-doubt, optimism-pessimism, instinct-intelligence, design-chance, individual-commonwealth, art-religion, religion-science, science-art, free-will-determinism, appearance-reality, egotism-altruism, cruelty-kindness, life-death, matter-spirit. In juggling these dualities we will need to judge when it is appropriate to privilege one of the binary terms over the other (and which one) and when it is appropriate to hold both of them together in tension.

It is just here, in providing models for these delicate moral judgements, that ethical fictions and ethical criticism have educative value - and that some fictions, because they are more subtly true-to-life, are better than others. Thus Byatt portrays Matty as a master of such judgement. From the beginning of the story she is shown to have been an extremely detached and perspicacious observer of human and animal nature, even where her own interests are involved. William has had many intimations of this, for we are often told that he was vaguely aware of her sharp looks and ironic comments. But it is only after William has discovered Eugenia's devastating secret that Matty finally reveals to him that she has been minutely studying him and what pertains to his

happiness (and hers?) ever since he arrived. (156) She certainly knows about Eugenia as soon as he does - but probably sooner - as she signals to him in the game of anagrams which members of the household play in the evening following upon William's fateful day of discovery. This marvellous scene, rich in reverberations, also shows the mastery Matty has over language - that symbolic system which has given humans so much power over the world - since she can play with it adeptly, conveying serious information with characteristically light irony.

The game consisted of making words out of alphabet cards, prettily decorated with pictures of harlequins, monkeys, columbines and devils with forks. Everyone had nine letters, and could give any complete word they could make secretly to anyone else, who must change at least one letter, and pass it on. The game was not to be left with the letters with demons on, which were, rather at random, some of the awkward letters, like Q and X and some of those in demand, like Es and Ss. William played with half his mind, pushing on easy words like 'was' and 'his' and 'mine' and accumulating demons. At one point, finding himself with PHXNITCSE he suddenly woke up, and found himself able to present Matty Crompton with INSECT even though that left him with an X with a demon on it. Miss Crompton, her face heavily shadowed in the lamplight, gave a small snort of laughter at this word, considered it for some time, rearranged the cards, and pushed it back to him. He was about to point out that the rules did not allow of returning the same word with adding or subtracting a letter, when he saw *what* she had sent him. There it was, lying innocently in his hand. INCEST. He shuffled the evidence hastily, looked up and met the dark intelligent eyes.

'Things are not what they seem,' said Matty Crompton amiably. William looked at his cards, and saw that he could make another word, *and* get rid of the X, and answer her message. So he pushed his word back, and she gave another snort of laughter, and the game went on. But now, his eyes met hers, from time to time, and hers gleamed with knowledge and - yes - excitement. And he did not know if he was more comforted or alarmed that she knew. How long had she known? How? What did she think? Her smile was not commiserating, nor was it prurient, it was somehow satisfied and amused. The luck of the letters was uncanny. It gave him the feeling that occasionally comes to most of us, that however we protest we are moved by chance, and struck by random shocks and blows, in fact there *is* Design, there is Fate, it has us in its grip.

It was possible, of course, that *she* had somehow shaped his cards. She liked riddles. He watched the flick of her precise, thin wrists as she passed PHOENIX on to Elaine, neatly getting rid of the dangerous X. Did she see him as a dupe, as a poor victim? Had she *always* seen him that way? Things were not what they seemed, indeed. (153)

The word which William passed back to Matty is - as the reader may deduce - SPHINX, and it is appropriate not only because of its connection with incest and riddling in the Oedipus legend, but also because it appears in Matty's fairytale. She had been inspired to write her 'illustratory', 'instructive' 'puzzle-tale' (118, 119) partly by William's 'chronicle of [the] insect cities' (119) and partly by her reading about the naming of moths in Linnaeus's *Systema Natura* and Mouffet's *Theatrum Insectorum*.

Just after she has read William's work - in which he 'had argued round and round' (116) about 'Instinct or Intelligence, Design or Hasard, The

Individual and the Commonwealth, What is an Individual' (109) in ant and, by analogy, human societies - and just before she gives her tale to him, they have the following conversation:

She said, 'I liked your passage from Michelet about the depredations of the Sphinx Atropos. It is amazing how much - how much of mystery, of fairy *glamour* - is added to the creatures by the names bestowed upon them.'

'I used to think of Linnaeus, in the forest, constantly. He bound the New World so tightly to the imagination of the Old when he named the swallowtails for the Greek and Trojan heroes, and the Heliconiae for the Muses. There I was, in lands never before entered by Englishmen, and around me fluttered Helen and Menelaus, Apollo and the Nine, Hector and Hecuba and Priam. The imagination of the scientist had colonised the untrodden jungle before I got there. There is something wonderful about *naming* a species. To bring a thing that is wild, and rare, and hitherto unobserved under the net of human observation and human language - and in the case of Linnaeus, with such wit, such order, such lively use of our inherited myths and tales and characters. He wished to call the Atropos the Caput mortuum, you know, the Death's Head exactly - but the system of nomenclature requires a monosyllable.'

'So he chose the blind Fury with the abhorred Shears. Poor innocent insect, to have its small life burdened with so large an import...' (118)

Naming God's creatures in the Garden of Eden was one of Adam's first tasks and a sign of his dominion over Creation, but scientists (the new men) have undertaken to observe the world and categorise it all over again. However, they cannot escape the need to anthropomorphise nature in terms of the stories which have given meaning to life throughout European history. In fact it is difficult to conceive of doing this in any other way than by relating the unknown to the known - by creating analogies. Yet how interesting that science, in seeking in its own way to give a more accurate account of the world, has turned not to Christian mythology for these analogies but to the myths of ancient Greek religion. One reason for this was, no doubt, that Greek mythology is much more attuned to nature, but another may be that the Christian stories were still widely taken literally and so could not be so readily used as metaphors. Matty's story plays upon these mythological-cum-scientific names in order to make sense of William's unfortunate circumstances. In so doing, she succeeds in pointing a moral which he needs to learn in its most far-reaching applications, and in restoring a religious dimension - indeed an element of faith in the goodness of life - to his thinking.

In Matty's story, entitled 'Things Are Not What They Seem', Seth, the youngest son of a struggling farmer, is sent out into the world to seek his fortune. He travels the oceans until finally he is shipwrecked with his companions on an unknown shore. Travelling inland, they come to a walled palace which they enter. It seems to be deserted but in a great banqueting hall they find a sumptuous feast which all of them immediately set upon, except for

Seth who, like Adam in the Garden of Eden, has been taught by his father 'never to eat anything that was not freely offered'. (120) After some time the owner of the palace enters, accompanied by a goat-man and various animals. She is 'a cheerful, *comfortable*-looking lady, dressed a little like a shepherdess, in a frilly cap and a delightful embroidered apron, with beautiful white ringlets falling to her shoulders. In her hand she carried the prettiest shepherd's crook, decorated with ribbons, silver and rose and sky-blue, and she had the sweetest smile, and the most dancing eyes'. (120, 121) She welcomes her visitors enthusiastically and encourages them to go on eating, turning her persuasive charm especially on Seth who remains reluctant. Of course, well-educated people have read similar stories before (though never with such a delicious conjunction of Little Bo Peep and Circe) and they know precisely what is about to happen. But Seth is not very literate, only polite and sensibly cautious. Finally the lady shames him into taking just three pomegranate seeds. She then reveals that she is 'a Fairy who likes to make things pleasant for mortal men', that her 'name is Mrs Cottitoe Pan Demos - which means "for all the people"', and that she keeps 'open house for everyone who comes'. (122) She demonstrates her magic by making the feast disappear and by immobilising the sailors. When the cook asks that they be allowed to leave, Mrs Cottitoe replies, "How ungrateful men are... They will not stay, whatever we give them, they will not rest, they *will* sail away". (122) Whereupon she changes each of them into a different breed of pig, except for Seth who only has his hair changed into a kind of mane. Seth is then put in charge of looking after his companions and a collection of other unfortunate creatures in the caverns beneath the palace.

Seth could be read as roughly representing William, and Mrs Cottitoe as Eugenia. But they could also stand for all men and women, in which case Matty might be empathising to some degree with Mrs Cottitoe. Later Matty reveals that she would like to be William's constant companion in his travels, but, unlike Mrs Cottitoe and Eugenia, she has all along respected his desire to sail away and his freedom to do so. Indeed, she has helped him to regain the power to do just that, and, while she is determined to go with him as far as Brazil, she offers to go her own way from then on. Furthermore, whereas Eugenia has never been open with William until she is forced to be, Matty, after keeping her desires hidden for so long, now wants William to see her as she is before he decides to go with her. Matty's behaviour, I contend, is thoroughly ethical: she knows how to strike a balance between keeping silent and speaking the truth, but she also knows that in the end freedom depends on things being rightly (i.e. more accurately) seen.

Further reinforcing the analogy between Seth and William, Matty has Seth rescued from his hopeless plight by an ant which brings him three fernseeds from beyond the wall of the palace. Seth is reduced to the size of the ant and led through tiny fissures out into the garden. There he finds himself surrounded by all the plants, which now seem to him huge, and is 'overcome with a mixture of awe, and apprehension, and admiration of the huge force behind all this burgeoning'. He is threatened by some fierce-looking caterpillars and is reassured that they are actually harmless by a spider-like fairy called Miss Mouffet. She answers Seth's questions, including telling him about the poetic names of the caterpillars, for, as he says, he comes 'from a country family, where name giving is a family occupation'. (131) Miss Mouffet comments that "'Names...are a way of weaving the world together, by relating the creatures to other creatures and a kind of *metamorphosis*, you might say, out of *metaphor* which is a figure of speech for carrying one idea into another.'" (132) She then arranges for Seth to be carried on the back of the Sphinx Atropos, the death's head moth, to the home of the Fairy-beyond-the-wall, a more powerful being than Dame Cottitoe. When Seth asks Miss Mouffet about the name of the Sphinx, she replies in a lowered voice: "'Sphinx is one of the names of the great Fairy. It means, in part, the asker of riddles. And the answer, too. She loves these moths because they are riddles, like herself.'" (134) She also tells him that he must go now

'...into her Presence. But the journey is fearful, and the place where She is is not for the faint-hearted. For you must go into the Shadows and beyond, and few return from there.'

'Will she help me?'

'She helps all of us, though some of us do not recognise her help for what it is.'

'Will she restore me to my former shape?'

'She will change you, for that is her work. It may be that the change will be a restoration.' (135)

When Seth finally comes into the Temple of the Lady, he is in a gloomy underworld where all but the moths are asleep. She appears both beautiful and savage, and he begs her to help him. Whereupon he is commanded to lie down to sleep before the cavern and to accept what dreams may come:

He dreamed of kind hands touching his brow, and of hot, bloody breath in his ears, and he heard a voice crying, 'Fear no more,' and another saying, 'I care for nothing, all must go,' and he saw in his dream everything that was, like a great river hurrying to the lip of a huge fall, and going over, in one great rush of mingled matter, liquids and solids, blood and fur and feather and leaf and stone, and he awoke with a terrible cry, and the even light was as it had been.

And the Figure behind the veil addressed him directly in a low voice, neither male nor female, which asked him who he was, and what he desired. (138)

Before he can be helped Seth must answer the Figure's question, 'What is my name?' but so many names rush through his mind that he is dumbfounded. Finally he says,

'How can I name you, who have more names than all the creatures, when they have so many each, and Elpenor is Elephant, Hawk, Pig, Twilight Lover and Sphinx and he is only one tiny rosy moth? How can I name you, when you are hidden behind a veil, and you spin your own hiding-place, and make your own light? What would any name I choose be, to you? I cannot name you, and yet I believe you will help me, for Mistress Mouffet said you would, if you wished to, and I do believe, I do believe you are kind -'

And at that all the moths danced furiously and the light inside the silk moved with laughter, and the voice said, 'You have solved the riddle most excellently, for I am indeed kind, and that is one of my names, one of the best of them. I am known as Dame Kind in many places, and you have understood my riddle by trusting me. So I will help you. (139)

Seth is enabled to rescue his friends, who, restored to their manhood, return to their adventures. But before he leaves her presence, Dame Kind - who, of course, represents nature itself, the mystery of energy and matter apparently springing out of nothing and metamorphosing in space and time - has one more thing to say to him.

'...Here, as you may have noticed, you have many forms and many sizes, for you are what you are as reflected in the pupil of my Eye, which you cannot see, for it is behind the veil and shrinks and grows huge like a dark moon, like the pupil of a great cat. And what I see and what my Eye reflects is your outward case, containing what you may become, like Atropos's pupa, which is named for a carved doll, or a small girl child, ready to grow. I hold you small in my gaze, Seth, and you may grow in it, or shrink in it, or vanish, if I blink. You may see my pupil, or my puppet, as you choose well or ill. Everything is single and double. Things are not what they seem.' (139)

Matty captures in her delightful story a sense of both scientific and religious wonder in the face of nature. Her anthropomorphising fable - certainly not an attempt at realist fiction - is quite accurate in its presentation of our experience of life. Nature is indeed both single and double; it is ineluctably paradoxical. Sooner or later it kills us, yet in the interim it can be kind, for it has created us and therefore cannot be altogether inimical to our flourishing through the transforming stages of our lives. In its eye Seth may grow or shrink or vanish. But what does Matty mean by Dame Kind's pun on the words 'pupil' and 'puppet', one of which Seth may see, depending on whether he chooses well or ill? Is Matty offering William a veiled choice between herself, as William's pupil in their study of natural history, and Eugenia, who is a mere puppet of her own and Edgar's natural instincts?

Matty is writing an instructive fable for a general audience of young readers, but she admits to having been carried away by language, in particular the metaphorical names of the insects. Also she is afraid there is 'too much message'. (141) Like most writers she is no doubt trying to make sense of her own concerns in what she writes, in spite of being constrained by the resources of language available to her - in this case, for example, by Derrida's 'already said'. Chief among these concerns is William. Why then does Matty convey the moral of her story to William in such a riddling way? Why doesn't she tell him straight out what she thinks he needs to know? One answer may lie in the fact that Byatt presents her as an enterprising, creative and patient teacher of the children of the house. She knows that people must be led into understanding by appropriate experiences at the appropriate time, and that only in this context can direct instruction be effective. She also knows - and she has taught William this - that narrative combines vicarious experience with instruction in the most palatable form. However, William misses the point of her fairytale as it applies directly to him, since he has not yet had the experience which will make it unequivocally relevant.

William was much surprised by Miss Crompton's flight of imagination. It made him uneasy, in ways he could not quite analyse, and at the same time his own imagination could not quite see her *writing* this story. She had always seemed dry, and this tale, however playful, was throbbing with some sort of emotion...

'...The impression I got was one of thickening *mystery*, like the riddle of the Sphinx herself, a most portentous person. I think childish readers will find both instruction and delight in it.'

'Ah,' said Miss Crompton. Then, 'I had meant to write a fabulous Tale, not an allegory, it is true.'

'I wondered if Dame Cottitoe was the Church, at one point. Bishops, you know, with crooks. There have been very pretty religious allegories using butterflies, since Psyche is the Soul and the Greek name for butterflies -'

'I had no such grand aims, I assure you. My message was linked to my title.'⁶⁴

'"Things Are Not What They Seem,'" said William. Well, that is certain at least. That is a good lesson. You could have included the mimicry of poisonous butterflies by harmless ones, observed by Bates -' (141)

In William's reaction to Matty's tale, Byatt shows us that the experience of art, without some measure of the real life experience to which it refers, is just empty riddling, and conversely, that real life experience is potentially devastating without the meaningful context in which art can place it. Education through art is the business of creating useful analogies, and as we have seen, religion and

⁶⁴ It occurs to me that a cynically allegorical reading of Byatt's novella might interpret it politically, with Bredely Hall as upper class, Conservative-party England and Eugenia as Maggie Thatcher. Byatt gives an example of such an allegorical reading here when she has William wondering if Matty's fairy story can be read as a religious allegory directed against the spell-binding power of Bishops armed with crooks.

science participate in this practice in their own ways. Matty, with characteristic elegance and modesty, is able to combine all three modes of making sense of the world in her fairytale.

Another important aspect of the role of art in moral education is apparent here. The riddling quality of analogy allows for a variety of interpretations of the work, especially of a tale like Matty's. Any one reader's interpretations will of course be partly predetermined by a variety of factors: social, political, personal etcetera.⁶⁵ But, in so far as readers can learn that different interpretations are possible, they will then be free to choose between them. As we have seen, Matty is concerned to enlarge William's freedom of choice, even though she has been manipulating him in both their interests, but she foregoes any further manipulation when they discuss her story, allowing him the freedom to miss her personal meaning. Artists certainly set out to manipulate their consumers for all kinds of interests, and art can be used to convey good or bad morals. In this direction lie propaganda and indoctrination, which raise important considerations concerning the moral responsibility of artists. Certainly young readers should be made aware of alternative readings, including resistant ones, if they are to become more autonomous agents.

Byatt's portrayal of how Matty translates her own principle into practice suggests that she is more successful than William in balancing objectivity and subjectivity, altruism and egotism,⁶⁶ yet she risks her altruistic objectivity in the very act of writing her fairy tale and showing it to William. Fortunately or unfortunately (who can tell?), he had been too blind to her desires to see the self-interested meaning the tale has for her. She maintains her equilibrium until the very end when, trusting again to good fortune, she reveals the self-interest which partly motivates most, if not all, human acts of altruism, and achieves what she and William both desire: escape, love, adventure and the pursuit of knowledge. After the game of anagrams, when William had been struck by the luck of the letters and felt himself to be in the grip of fate, he and Matty meet in her room. William implies that Matty had sent for him to come back to the house to discover Eugenia and Edgar, but she denies this, saying, "There are

⁶⁵ Byatt touches on this subject in 'The Conjugal Angel' from the perspective of the writer: she portrays the poet Tennyson as being aware that in producing his own work he inevitably draws on the language of all the writers he has ever read. (268, 269) William Adamson's and Harald Alabaster's early religious views have likewise been more or less 'rewritten' by their exposure to the discourse of Darwin *et al.* However, it is clear that this discourse would not have such power over them if it did not concur to some degree with their observations of life.

⁶⁶ Perhaps we should add another binary opposition to the list: truthfulness/deception. Matty encourages William to 'be truthful, as far as possible, or the whole truth will never be found. You must say nothing you do not think'. (117, 118) At the same time she is being less than completely honest with William, but in both their interests. Also they are practising an extended subterfuge on Eugenia and her family in writing and publishing their books. Are truthfulness and lying ever compatible? I have examined this question in my discussion of *Heart of Darkness*. Suffice to say here that morality seems to be inescapably paradoxical.

people in a house, you know, who know everything that goes on - the invisible people, and now and then *the house* simply decides that something must happen - I think your message came after a series of misunderstandings that at some level were quite deliberate -" (155) Presumably the same thing had occurred when 'someone' led Eugenia's fiancée, Captain Hunt, to see a hint of her incestuous relationship. (151) The house has been compared to an ants' nest and William has reflected in his book on the way in which the ants seem often to be moved by a kind of group intelligence, 'a Spirit of the Nest'. (40) Here, then, William's and Matty's interests seem to have been served by some 'deliberate misunderstandings', a kind of instinct of the community which is opposed to incest. At first sight it might appear that 'the house's' intuitive opposition to incest has resulted in a misguided action in exposing Eugenia and Edgar to William, since he goes away and allows their relationship to continue. However, if William had acted only according to his instinct in the matter he would almost certainly have put an end to their incestuous practice, perhaps by resorting to violence. Instead he brings to bear his capacity to reflect and reason, skills which have evolved in humans because of their adaptive qualities but which may now enable us to take some control of our future. Matty has learned to use her reasoning skills to work with the immanent 'spirit' of life, a kind of power of design or fate, which paradoxically works through the accidents of genetic mutation. Thus she says, 'There are people in houses, between the visible inhabitants and the invisible, largely invisible to *both*, who can know a great deal, or nothing, as they choose. I choose to know about some things, and not to know about others. I have become interested in knowing things that concern you'. (155)

Not surprisingly William feels used, certainly by Eugenia, but also, in a more beneficent way, by Matty. However, through a process of disillusionment everything is being made clear to him, including Matty's own needs, and he is now being given the opportunity to take his destiny into his own hands. (155) Matty has provided them both with the means to leave, even before William could think of it, and he is grateful for her interference. He sees her as a 'good Fairy' (156) but she wants to be more than that: she is determined to go with him despite his objection that as a gentlewoman she could not endure the privations of life in the jungle. Gradually her desires are unfolded to William and he begins to see her as she truly is - a passionate, capable but still vulnerable woman with a strong feminine name, not the neutral 'Matty':

'My name,' she said, 'is Matilda. Up here at night there is no Matty. Only Matilda. *Look at me.*'

And she put up her hands to her head and undid the plaits of her hair over her ears, and shook it out, and came and stood before him. And her face

between the dark tresses was sharp and eager and hungry, and he watched how trimly she turned and said, 'I have seen your *wrists*, Matilda. I dreamed about them now and then. You have - remarkable - wrists.'

'I only wanted you to *see me*,' said Matilda, less confidently, once she saw that he had indeed seen her. He saw that her cheekbones were high and sharp, and her mouth was hard, not soft, but full of life. He saw how quick she turned at the waist, and thought quickly of a greyhound. He said, 'I don't think that was all you wanted.'

'I wanted you to be happy,' said Matilda, fiercely.

William stood up, and looked her in the eye, and put his hands on her waist.

'I will be,' he said. 'I will be.'

He pulled her against him, the unyielding Matty Crompton, the new hungry Matilda. (157, 158)

Thus Matilda has been successfully sustaining a double life, but is now able to integrate both selves in a full relationship with William, one which serves both of their interests. Moreover, in this relationship we can see Byatt's prototype of a feminist project aimed at reshaping the politics of gender. It depicts a rational enterprise instigated by women whose bold strategies draw upon an increasingly clear sense of the biological and cultural determinations of gender. It may be a utopian vision but ethics and politics need some sense of what they might strive to achieve. As a male I welcome the recognition of both gender difference and human equality which this vision includes.

In the final scene of the novella - the happy ending - Byatt creates an image in which every detail encapsulates her vision of a good life lived optimistically in the uncertainties of the postmodern world. William and Matilda are on a ship midway between the Old and New Worlds, and on the crest of a wave between 'the flowing, spangled river of the Milky Way' and the 'phosphorescent animalcules' (159) which inhabit the ocean depths. Matilda, no longer in drab clothing, wears a crimson shawl, identifying her perhaps with the blood-red ants, the slave makers which she and William had observed in the wood. She has, in a sense, captured William from Eugenia's nest and used him for her own purposes, though he has co-operated with her willingly enough. Indeed, now that he is fully aware of her plot he has become an equal partner in the conspiracy. 'William's brown hand grips her brown wrists on the rail', (160) and thus their warm colouring contrasts strongly with the cold whiteness of Eugenia Alabaster. 'They breathe salt air, and hope, and their blood swims with the excitement of the future.' (160) Captain Papagay joins them, bringing an amber-gold butterfly which had been found by a midshipman in the rigging.

It is the Monarch, says William, excited, Danaus Plexippus, which is known to migrate great distances along the American coast. They are strong fliers, he tells Matilda, but the winds can carry them hundreds of miles out to sea. Matilda observes to William and Captain Papagay that the wings are still dusky

with life. 'It fills me with emotion,' she says. 'I do not know whether it is more fear, or more hope. It is so fragile, and so easily crushed, and nowhere in reach of where it was going. And yet it is still alive, and bright, and so surprising, rightly seen.' 'That is the main thing,' says Captain Papagay. 'To be alive. As long as you are alive, everything is surprising, rightly seen.' And the three of them look out with renewed interest at the points of light in the dark around them. (160)

Everything is surprising, rightly seen. Byatt's 'Morpho Eugenia' is a story about seeing things more and more clearly as they truly are, for right living depends on accurate information. Knowledge of the truth, in this sense, sets us free. We may never know the whole truth - or, indeed, be able to determine an a categorical imperative - but perhaps we can make some progress towards it, if we begin by recalling that things are not what they seem. Rightly viewing the circumstances of our lives - represented afresh in new works of art, in revised versions of religion, in new theories of ethics, and in the on-going observation and analogising of science - lends to the world a new enchantment. Freed from old illusions, and wary of new ones, we can then choose, if we so desire, to emulate the warm, fragile beauty of the Monarch butterfly rather than the cold, deceptive shapeliness of Morpho Eugenia. We can be like Matilda and William: grateful for life, making the most of each fleeting moment, enjoying the company of like-minded people and doing what we can to help others find happiness too.

One of the circumstances of our lives which Byatt has made us see more clearly is that 'Instinct [is] Predestination' (116) for human beings as well as animals, yet she also affirms that sometimes humans are capable of sufficient objectivity to give them a choice in how their instincts may be fulfilled. At least this is so when they work together, as Matty and William do, and take risks in the faith that nature will, for the moment anyway, continue to favour the flourishing of human life. It is especially significant that Matty and William work together on a liberating project which is conducted through *writing*, undertaken in order to make some provisional sense of experience and to convey that sense to others. Indeed, they each write for the same youthful audience but in different genres - those of natural history and fable - and within different discourses - those of science and mythological literature. Hence Byatt demonstrates that the extent to which people can command the powers of language within a variety of discourses, rather than be completely commanded by them and by their instincts, determines the degree to which they become self-conscious, imaginative, objective, free, circumspect - and so more capable of ethical judgements. Herein lies some encouragement to implement an ethics education program in schools, one in which writing, reading and reflecting together on stories will play a key role.

Another circumstance of our lives which is apparent in 'Morpho Eugenia' is that social discourses are also predestination, since our complex selves are to some extent discursively constructed. The opening up of a degree of freedom of choice in this respect has been the educational project of critical social literacy, to which I shall return in the next chapter. For the moment, though, I reiterate that social structures are themselves the adaptive strategies of beings who are responding fundamentally to biological imperatives. Hence evolutionary theory ought at least to underpin our construction of discourse theories. Yet, with further developments in such fields as memetics and complexity theory, perhaps evolutionary theory can reshape our understanding of discourse - including literature - more extensively than anyone has previously thought possible.

Part Three: Praxis

Chapter 4

Critical literacy teaching as principled practice

1. Towards an ethical and political literacy

All aspects of English teaching, including literary criticism and critical literacy, need to be informed by an even more highly sophisticated understanding of the nature of the self and society, ethics and politics, language and communication, science, art and religion - an understanding which goes well beyond the relatively narrow range of discourse theories with which critical literacy advocates have been grappling. In Chapter 2 I have indicated just some of the areas of research from which literacy theorists could profit. In most cases, of course, practising teachers will not have time for such an encyclopaedic survey as I have barely begun in this study, but they should at least be aware of two things: new conceptions of the subject English are always in need of further refinement, often from unorthodox directions; and the practices which new approaches advocate may in themselves be morally ambivalent. As we have seen, Bauman (1993) stresses this second point, declaring that almost everything we do for the good of others also has unforeseen detrimental side effects. Thus part of their duty of care for their students requires teachers to be both open-minded and sceptical, to take risks in attempting to help them and to be as circumspect as they can in adopting new strategies. Furthermore, as teachers discuss these pedagogical problems openly with their students, drawing upon the full range of their own experience and interests, and as they live out this ethic of cautious risk-taking in all their dealings with them, so too their students may learn by example and precept to be more careful of the needs of others. In this way, beginning with teachers of ethical and political literacy, caring communities of rigorous inquirers might flourish in classrooms around the world, sharing in the on-going task of freeing humanity from destructive illusions and finding new enchantment in the astonishing circumstances of our lives.

In spite of all that has been said so far, I cannot be certain of convincing literary critics and teachers of critical literacy that moral education and ethical reflection are important missing ingredients in our dialogues about English teaching today. However, it might be salutary to compare what is regularly discussed in the pages of *English in Australia* and at AATE national

conferences with what excites and dominates the interest of students in classroom conversations. In their professional discussions teachers are continually asked to consider various aspects of literacy, yet rarely, if ever, do they deliberate about the values which direct their practice. For example aesthetic values are rarely mentioned any more. Indeed, another study could be undertaken to investigate why this is the case, and to pursue an important question which for the most part has had to remain in the wings of this study: that of the relationship between aesthetics and ethics. Social (i.e. moral) values are assumed in discussions of the politics of literacy which occupy a great deal of attention, but as we have seen, politics has frequently been divorced from deeper ethical questions about the purpose of life and how it should be lived. Contrary to this scenario, in my experience students are eager to discuss ethical issues as they are modelled, albeit problematically, in class texts, and as those issues can be applied to themselves and the bewildering world they live in. They are fascinated by the 'big' philosophical questions about the nature of existence, which in the end impinge upon their lives ethically.

Most English teachers, therefore, are already 'doing' a relatively unexamined form of ethics in their classrooms. Hence it is time they talked about it in order to refine their practice, publicly justify their inculcation of particular values, and avoid the excesses of indoctrination. Perhaps they could shed further light on the relationship between the political agendas which they are being urged to pursue and the ethical underpinnings of such concerns. It will no longer suffice to leave open to the 'free' play of interpretation their answers to the question, 'How can we live, if we hope to live together in our local, national and global societies as best we can?' In consultation with students and the wider community, teachers should adopt a credible system of ethics, a meta-ethical theory - however modest it might be in the final analysis - one which can help them determine effective answers to this all-important issue. This is why I have taken the risk of championing evolutionary ethics, whilst pointing out that there are also other approaches which are currently worth pursuing. I hope that a lively debate about what might be the best ethical theory to underpin critical literacy practices will ensue.

While critical literacy is a largely admirable practice, especially as it has been promoted by Colin Lankshear, (1994) it is clear that there are particular problems associated with it:

1. Theorists and practitioners of critical literacy have largely neglected to declare the intentions and ethical foundations which direct the value positions which they adopt. (James Gee, as we have seen, is a notable exception.) While it

is ultimately impossible to guarantee that critical literacy methods will not be used to promote attitudes and behaviour which are inhumane, we are better able to judge the morality of those practitioners who are willing to be open about their motives and who give reasons for their aims and methods. Indeed, more urgent than a workable pedagogy of critical literacy, is the need for educators, and the communities which they serve, to engage in critical and creative dialogue in order to redefine the values which will best serve human flourishing within a sustainable environment, and to find the courage to inculcate these values into their children. The value of respect for cultural diversity can only be sustained by a commitment to the resolution of serious conflicts of interest through peaceful negotiation rather than destructive conflict. Thus schools need to impart an understanding of diverse traditions within a multicultural society and to espouse core values which can unite those traditions in harmonious social relationships. Careful selection of literary and other narrative texts for class study can help in achieving these aims.

2. Critical literacy has not adequately addressed the problem of what to do about students who understand the demands of social justice but continue to exploit others. Indeed, a grasp of critical literacy might give such students greater power to pursue completely selfish ends. Here I think teachers can learn from the experience of the Philosophy for Children movement, which has achieved some success in drawing anti-social students into the caring community of inquiry which it develops in the philosophy classroom. I will say more of this in section 2 of this chapter.

3. By concentrating on empowering oppressed individuals and groups, critical literacy runs the risk of further fragmenting our already divided society. The post-structuralist tendency to reduce social relationships to the exercise of power simply reinforces what Zohar and Marshall (1994) see as the outdated, mechanistic view of politics as confrontation rather than conciliation. Of course society is shaped by power, but it is power wielded by human beings who, in most cases, also possess a degree of free will and moral sense, even though their consciences may have been made more ego-centric by particular social discourses and personal experiences. As social animals humans are morally ambivalent, a mixture of selfishness and altruism. Hence our ethics and politics will be inadequate if we ignore the impulses which draw us into relationships of care and co-operation, focusing only on those which set us in competition against each other. What is needed, therefore, to support the political aims of critical literacy is a clear philosophy of moral and ethical education and the part which literacy teaching can play within it.

4. The social justice values which critical literacy theorists seem to espouse have become associated with multi-culturalism and political correctness, two aspects of postmodern life about which many people in Australia and other Western societies seem to be increasingly uneasy. This uneasiness has become apparent in Australia in the debates which have followed the statements on these matters by the recently elected, independent, right-wing politician, Pauline Hanson. Why is it that the mildly left-wing politics which established the welfare state in Australia and the UK, and which have been influential in the development of critical literacy, have not been successful in converting everyone to the value of controlled immigration and cultural pluralism, or of redressing entrenched injustices to aborigines and women through affirmative action? One answer to this question can be found in sociobiology. Humans evolved in small tribal and family groups which depended on co-operation with one another for survival, while competing for scarce resources with rival groups. The proliferation of neo-tribes in postmodern societies, which Bauman (1993) describes, can be simply explained as atavistic social behaviour in response to the need for survival in the social and physical circumstances of urban life which many individuals find increasingly threatening. Some of these tribes are familial, some racial, national or religious, and some are sub-cultural, being based on social class, gender, sexuality, or some other focus of identity. Often these groupings are driven by an overt sense of exclusion from the so-called 'mainstream'. Selected readings followed by discussion in the critical literacy classroom could help to make this instinctive behaviour more conscious and so enable students to bring rational processes to bear in defusing their own fears and prejudices, and in learning to understand and placate the fears of others.

Another reason why many people are feeling uneasy about multi-culturalism and political correctness is their intuition that they entail irreconcilable conflicts in the application of particular moral principles which are generally endorsed by the wider community. For example cultural pluralism asks individuals to tolerate others' differences which may morally offend them, whilst at the same time to co-operate with others in spite of these differences. Thus an Anglo-Saxon feminist might have to teach children of Greek migrants who allow their sons, but not their daughters, to participate in after-school activities. On the one hand, the principle of tolerance demands that she show respect for the customs of the migrants by supporting the children in maintaining good relationships with their parents, and on the other, the principle of gender equity demands that she expose the inequity to her students and help them to develop strategies for redressing it. Delicate ethical and political

negotiations are required if such conflicts of principle are to be resolved both in theory (if possible) and in practice.

Political correctness in the form of affirmative action may, for instance, ask individuals to accept an apparent injustice to a well qualified job-candidate from a privileged social group, when the position is awarded to a slightly less qualified candidate from a marginalised group, such as Australian aborigines. Here is another perplexing ethical and political problem, one which has been debated passionately and extensively in the United States. James Rachels, (1993) in his primer of ethics, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, addresses this issue of 'reverse discrimination' from the perspective of his version of evolutionary ethics, which he calls 'Morality Without Hubris'. According to his account of the implications of evolutionary theory, moral philosophy must dispense with the old and discredited assumption that humans are essentially superior to other species. The primary rule of morality which Rachels applies to this issue is stated as follows:

We ought to act so as to promote impartially the interests of everyone alike, except when individuals deserve particular responses as part of their own past behaviour.

He then comments:

This principle combines the best elements of both Utilitarianism and Kantian 'respect for persons,' but it is not produced simply by stitching those two philosophies together. Rather, it springs naturally from a consideration of the main facts of the human condition - that we are perishable beings with interests that may be promoted or frustrated, and that we are rational beings responsible for our conduct. (185)

In applying this principle to the case of reverse discrimination involving a well qualified white American candidate from a privileged background, and a slightly less well qualified black American candidate from an underprivileged background, Rachels says the key question is: '*What accounts* for the fact that the white [candidate] is better qualified?' (191) Thus if the white student has chosen to work hard at gaining his qualifications while the black student has chosen only the easy subjects and spent his time partying instead of working, then the white could justifiably complain of unfair treatment if he did not get the job. However, if both have worked equally hard, but the black student has had to contend with a more difficult social environment and poorer educational opportunities, and this accounts for his poorer qualifications, then there is no injustice to the white student in giving the black student the job. 'Natural advantages of birth,' says Rachels, 'are not legitimate bases of desert'. (192)

It is in facing such difficulties as I have described here that critical literacy as both principled and strategic political practice (i.e. praxis) needs the organising concepts, clarifications, explanations, rational justifications, and processes for making difficult judgements which the discourse of ethics provides. Furthermore, an ethical and political critical literacy will need to be informed by an understanding of the way different ethical theories can throw light on different problems, for no doubt a completely satisfactory synthesis of these theories lies sometime in the future, if it is possible at all. Rachels, at the time of writing *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, expresses confidence that his Morality Without Hubris is a satisfactory theory, but he goes on to say,

...it is instructive to remember that a great many thinkers have tried to devise such a theory, and history has judged them to have been only partially successful. This suggests that it would be wise not to make too grandiose a claim for one's own view. Moreover, as the Oxford philosopher Derek Parfit has observed, the earth will remain habitable for another billion years, and civilization is now only a few thousand years old. If we do not destroy ourselves, moral philosophy, along with all the other human inquiries, may yet have a long way to go. (192, 193)

5. Surprisingly, critical literacy has not yet engaged extensively with two major issues which are associated with the ills of late capitalism: unemployment and the destruction of the environment. Cultural studies may be ahead of critical literacy here. For example Jennifer Slack and Laurie Whitt (1992) have made a compelling case for cultural studies theorists to analyse and critique their old ethical assumptions and to engage with ethics in a way which would allow them 'to counter the oppressive forces of the New Right [in the USA] and of the well-entrenched ecological indifference of late capitalism'. (571) The problem for cultural studies and critical literacy, however, is the same: they have both been deeply ambivalent about capitalism, for reasons which Fredric Jameson (1991) and James Gee (1993) have pointed out. On the one hand they have opposed capitalist exploitation from the perspective of various kinds of Marxism, and on the other they have complied with capitalism as it has been associated with democracy, individual freedom and the proliferation of choice. In fact, capitalism exploits 'choice', as it has exploited the environment, and thus post-structuralist notions of the proliferation of interpretations and of ways of being can play into the hands of capitalism.

The values of capitalism are ultimately the values of the market place. This may not be too bad while the market place belongs to a village where everyone knows everyone else and individuals have to co-operate in order to survive. But late capitalism is characterised by global market places and the extreme alienation of production and consumption both from each other and

from capital and its agents, which may also be alienated from one another. In this milieu choice itself becomes a commodity which multi-national corporations can market both to the so-called 'general public' and to sub-cultural 'niches'. Thus choice is offered to consumers in the form of the hyper-market, or one of those suburban strips which contain a proliferation of fast-food outlets, all of which might be owned ultimately by the same conglomerate. This may be attractive to many people as long as they have the money to participate and have not yet realised that all the different foods have a similarly bland taste. To the unemployed and poor, however, the prospect of these choices which are at least partly denied them may be deeply galling. However, any resentment so generated is unlikely to be directed at the real culprits who are well isolated from the ghettos where the dispossessed are forced to congregate. For it is a little publicised fact that capital requires a substantial pool of unemployed to keep the cost of labour down. The fear of unemployment and its alienating consequences, so evident in our society in which the social welfare state is being replaced by the philosophy of 'user pays', drives workers to accept work-place agreements in which they trade productivity increases, diminishment of working conditions, and various other benefits for pay rises. Thus fewer people work harder in poorer conditions for meagre increases in their purchasing power, while the growing pool of unemployed is pacified at the lowest possible price by 'welfare benefits', which allow them only to purchase the cheapest forms of mass-produced goods and entertainments. There are delicate political compromises to be struck here, since the pool of unemployed must not be allowed to reach a critical mass of discontented voters, and the cost of pacifying them must not exceed the ability of the employed taxpayers to afford. But, of course, it is not the unemployed who are allowed to have a significant voice in the negotiations.

This bleak sketch is certainly a caricature of our society, especially as it leaves out the positive, socially constructive motives which the captains of capitalism also share with their fellow human beings. It is merely intended to represent some key trends in late capitalism. If, then, this sketch is substantially accurate, it is no wonder that we witness widespread calls for a return to family and community values - especially from right-wing groups - and a growing interest in bio- and business ethics, in what may yet prove to be a futile attempt to paste this fragmenting social 'contract' back together. A similar caricature could be drawn of the strategic compromises which capitalism is ultimately being forced to make in order to maintain the profitability of resource-based industries, whilst conserving their increasingly scarce or polluted resources. Other forces have also been mobilised in this scenario, including those of

environmental ethics, the green movement's political lobbyists and the more extreme ecological guerrillas.

If critical literacy is to strategically deploy educational powers in the struggle to produce what the literacy theorist, Gunther Kress, (1994) calls 'a future society which offers its members the possibility of a life no less rich than that which we enjoy - even if in different perhaps less materialistic ways', (100) then it must be clear about its guiding principles and utopian dreams, as well as about its means of achieving them. Ethics, as I have argued, proceeds by peaceful and conciliatory means to establish principles and resolve conflicts. Most importantly, it is an enterprise predicated upon hope. Of course, ethics has its roots in the democratic discourse of the free men of the Athenian city-state, at a time when women and slaves were not considered to have a legitimate stake in determining the future of society. So ethics is not above being used to secure sectional interests. But, translated into today's more egalitarian ideal of the global village, ethics can be readily adapted to drawing around the negotiating table everyone with an interest in the outcome of its deliberations, the possessed and the dispossessed alike, and to attending carefully to each contribution.

For all of the above reasons critical literacy - a literacy which might be seen to promote only disillusionment - should be expanded to include ethical literacy - a literacy, as I conceive it, capable of producing both disillusionment and re-enchantment. In other words, we need an educational praxis, a pedagogy, which renews hope through the rigorous discussion of all kinds of texts - especially literary ones - and which helps students to grapple with the complexity of living out the positive motives in their lives. There is, of course, nothing particularly new about the aims of such a program: traditional literature courses have always dealt with issues of moral value. Moreover, English teachers have never ceased to be in some way conscious of the power of literary studies to contribute to this moral and ethical agenda, since literature models very diverse contexts and dramatises the interaction of different voices within them, thereby expanding immensely the scope of the dialogue which can take place in the classroom. Within the constraints of schooling, critical literacy turns its attention to an almost bewildering variety of texts, including mass media productions, computer games, political speeches and so on. And the understanding of the nature of textuality and of social and political issues which we are asked to deploy is overwhelmingly more complex. Yet it would be a pity if the wealth of simple and more subtle literary fictions which humans have produced were to be squeezed out of the curriculum for the sake of a too narrowly political conception of the aims of education, combined with an overcrowded canon of texts. As Nussbaum, Siebers and others have shown, and

as I hope my experiment in the ethical criticism of two novellas and a novel in Chapter 3 has also amply demonstrated, stories continue to offer the most engaging and confronting prototypes of what it has meant and can mean to live together in the world as best we can. Time and time again writers of stories have given imaginative and critical expression to the philosophies and ethos of their age, and moral philosophers have turned to those stories for their most potent illustrations. Educators owe it to our children to provide an initiation into the riches to be enjoyed through reading, creating and discussing stories in the context of a fully articulated ethical and political literacy program. Of course, my focus on the novel is not meant to imply that discussions of aural and visual narratives (including television, cinematic, theatrical and multi-media dramas) are not capable of achieving similar aims. In recognition of the value of such narratives I have used a play in the next section to illustrate some salient teaching techniques.

2. Teaching critical literacy ethically

If, as I have been proposing, an ethics founded on some synthesis of evolutionary, postmodern and metaphysical principles - an ethics of disillusionment and re-enchantment - is possible for today, how might English teachers act upon it? How might they construct a pedagogy of ethical and political literacy which is defensible in terms of this theory? As we have seen, Bauman (1993) and Wright (1995) are for different reasons sceptical that a completely coherent ethical system will ever be possible. Bauman warns us that even if we are confident that we have achieved a secure, universal system of morality, there can be terrible dangers associated with legislating for people's behaviour on that basis. Moreover, he points out that legislation abrogates individual moral responsibility and so tends to stifle the moral sense. Nor can philosophers argue everyone into being good: the most they can do is to make some kinds of conduct seem plausibly better than others. Thus Bauman advocates the nurture of individual conscience, although he does not propose how this may be achieved. Wright, however, suggests that moral and legal codes have a role to play in promoting human flourishing by acting as cultural determinants of behaviours which enhance co-operation and social stability. If, under the influence of evolutionary theory's revelation of the deeply selfish motives underlying morality, we were able to remove all internal and external moral sanctions, we would be dispensing with the very restraints which have evolved through our adaptation to our physical and social environments, and which have ensured our survival as a species. Thus Wright provides a justification for the leaders of society - legislators, teachers and parents - to inculcate an agreed set of social values into its citizens, especially while they are young and impressionable.

Churchland (1995) supports this program with his argument for the place of imparting to children increasingly sophisticated moral prototypes, or examples, by means of stories. Zohar and Marshall (1994: 271) put their trust in the value of dialogue about society's aims and methods, and advance complex reasons in line with their quantum notions as to why it has the potential to change individual attitudes and behaviour and thereby begin to revolutionise society. Dialogue, they say, substitutes the politics of conciliation for the politics of confrontation. Heylighen (1994, 1995, 1996) and his collaborators in the *Principia Cybernetica* project envisage an expanding dialogue taking place via the internet, involving interested participants from around the globe. A key element of this project is the development of information-handling techniques which will facilitate the evolution, by a process of natural selection, of a system

of knowledge through which humans may successfully adapt to their changing environments.

Thus an appropriate pedagogy of ethical and political literacy would be founded upon an epistemology in which human knowledge is seen as capable of evolving through a process of disillusionment and re-enchantment towards more accurate representations of the conditions of our lives. Such a pedagogy would also provide students with the tools of critical and creative inquiry, including the formal and informal logic of traditional philosophy, the deconstructive methods of post-structuralism, and the empirical processes of science. In this way many students would acquire the skills to question the values of their mentors on their own terms, and to construct new values and practices better adapted to their environment. Teachers will be aware that they have an immediate responsibility to engage with their students in such an open-ended dialogue - a dialogue about the ethical implications of the content and methods of their disciplines, about what contributes to human (and ecological) flourishing, about the moral codes which will help the inhabitants of our planet to live together as best we can.

A model for such a pedagogy, I believe, can be found in the Philosophical Inquiry program which has been devised by Matthew Lipman (1982, 1985, 1991) in the USA, and promoted in Australia by Laurance Splitter (1995), Philip Cam, (1995) Tim Sprod (1993) and others who are members of the international Philosophy for Children movement. In conjunction with this program as it operates from grades 2-10 at The Hutchins School, Hobart, where I teach, dialogue in the form of whole class discussion is being promoted as ultimately the only ethical means of nurturing ethical understanding and moral conduct through the school's values education program. A detailed and well documented pedagogy has been developed by the above-mentioned educators around the notion of dialogue within a 'community of inquiry'. They explain how such a pedagogy avoids the excesses of indoctrination, while requiring students to show consideration for one another in the classroom community, and how it develops their understanding of, and skill in dealing with, common problems through 'doing' philosophy.

Further work may be needed to develop the theory and practice of the community of inquiry, as it is understood in the Philosophy for Children movement, to respond to the challenges of post-structuralism. However, Philosophy for Children has been constructed by Lipman within the tradition of American philosophical pragmatism, which has grown up around such figures as Charles Peirce, John Dewey and Richard Rorty. Their versions of pragmatism include similarities to aspects of post-structuralism along the lines which I have discussed in Chapter 2.4. Furthermore, from his perspective as a

leading theorist of the postmodern, Jean François Lyotard (1992) discusses in a letter to a friend the nature, and some of the present difficulty, of teaching philosophy in high schools. He situates the aims and methods of this project within the history of Western philosophy from Pythagoras to postmodernity, and describes a commitment to open-ended questioning in the classroom which will be very familiar to proponents of the Philosophy for Children program. Of even greater significance, from my perspective, is an attempt by Philip Guin (1993) to supply the Philosophy for Children pedagogy with a foundation in the evolutionary epistemology of Karl Popper. (1979) Hence the community of inquiry method adopted by The Hutchins School's values education program provides an appropriate model for English teachers in promoting ethical literacy through class discussion of all kinds of texts, including literary works.

Since 1991 I have been a member of a working party responsible for developing the values education syllabus which is being implemented from K-12 by all teachers in all subjects at the school. Following our experience in grades 2-10 with the Philosophy for Children program, we have adopted as our basic teaching method Lipman's concept of the community of inquiry. In particular we are building on the success of the teachers of grade 6, who have been using the teaching materials entitled *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery: Philosophical Inquiry*, (Lipman 1982), and the teachers of grades 7 and 8 English, who have been using *Lisa: Ethical Inquiry*. (Lipman 1985) *Harry* lays the foundation for all philosophical discussion by introducing students to the basics of formal and informal logic. Through the student text and the activities contained in the teacher-support materials, teachers are able to lead their classes to conduct their inquiry in a more reasoned manner and to apply it to an extremely wide range of philosophical issues, including ethical, epistemological and metaphysical questions. *Lisa* builds on this foundation by leading students to inquire more deeply into ethics through raising many everyday issues for whole class and group discussion, and by encouraging students to give reasons and examples to support their views, and then to challenge one another's arguments in a logical way.

We have been willing to give up time in English lessons to follow the *Lisa* program partly because it uses a specially contrived novel to both model and stimulate reasoned, communal inquiry among children. From an aesthetic point of view the novel is in fact *too* contrived in the way it introduces philosophical themes, whilst it also lacks a sufficiently compelling development of the plot. Thus we sometimes pause to criticise it along those lines. For example we have noted that the lack of a compelling plot hinders students from engaging imaginatively and emotionally with the moral dilemmas which face

the characters. These criticisms serve to raise further philosophical issues for discussion, such as aesthetics, hermeneutics and literary theory in general, revealing that ethical inquiry needs the insights of literary theory as much as literary theory needs the insights of ethics. In using this novel English teachers are provided with an example of, and a method for dealing with, the fact that almost every other literary text they teach also raises pertinent moral issues - though usually not so many in the one text, and in most cases more engagingly. Indeed, English teachers at Hutchins are now being encouraged to complement their use of the Lipman novels with philosophical discussion of literary texts which are more typically studied in English classes. Philip Cam (1995) in *Thinking Together: Philosophical Inquiry for the Classroom* is proving particularly helpful in showing teachers how to apply Lipman's methods to such texts.

However, there remains an important advantage in using Lipman's novels - especially for Australian students reading those which are still only available in American versions. The very fact that the novels do not readily engage our students in identifying strongly with the characters and their dilemmas prevents these students from being too caught up in the illusion of reality which realist fiction frequently attempts to generate. Hence the students tend to move quickly from the particular circumstances in the novel which have given rise to the discussion of a philosophical issue to apparently more relevant examples in their own lives. The teacher then has the opportunity to point out to the class their easy movement from what they perceive as an unrealistic text to what they correspondingly see as their own more realistic accounts of life, and begin to open up post-structuralist and other questions about the nature of textuality which it raises. And not only should questions about realist fiction arise here: there are similar problems related to all kinds of verbal constructs from anecdotes to philosophical (e.g. ethical) theories. The challenge for the teacher is to make discussion and experimentation with these ideas both entertaining and enlightening: in fact, it may be that a too earnest (too committed?) approach to post-structuralist notions is the worst enemy of literary theory today. A grade 12 literature class, therefore, might find a suitably light-hearted exploration of textual issues in Laurence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*.

A key element of community of inquiry methods is the development of the students' sense of individual responsibility for the conduct and outcomes of their communal inquiry, particularly in valuing the contribution of every other student in arriving at the highest possible level of agreement about appropriate beliefs, attitudes and behaviour. In this way even reluctant and anti-social students can be encouraged by the other students, as well as the teacher, to

contribute positively. Gradually the teacher is able to relinquish her role as sole leader of the inquiry and enter the discussion as just another participant whose views are equally open to question. Initially she needs to inculcate those procedural values and practices which facilitate open-ended inquiry, while being careful not to tell the students what to think about the topic under discussion. Later, when these practices - such as listening carefully, respecting others' right to speak, challenging others' views by offering counter examples and arguments - have been internalised by the students, the teacher can contribute her own opinions more strongly and expect to have them challenged. In this way she can put into practice Hill's (1991) notion of 'committed impartiality' which empowers teachers to declare their own views, while pointing out those of the school and others, and encouraging students to make their own informed, rational judgements. Students begin to develop the confidence and skill to challenge one another and their teachers surprisingly early in the Philosophy for Children program. By grade 6 this is clearly evident in many students, and so by grades 11 and 12, if the pedagogy has been continued, a very lively and productive dialogue can take place between students who are usually more widely informed and represent a greater variety of points of view.

Experience has shown that teachers benefit from training in the methods of conducting a successful community of inquiry. Workshops are run in most Australian states in order to pass on the considerable expertise which Philosophy for Children practitioners have acquired. Now that teachers of English in grades 7 and 8 at The Hutchins School, together with a number of primary teachers, have developed some of this expertise, they are able to share it with the remaining members of the staff who are being asked to use it in teaching the ethical issues raised in and by their own subjects across the curriculum. First they need to find suitable materials to discuss - in other words texts of all kinds which deal with relevant ethical issues. Then they practise community of inquiry methods in faculty groups to define the issues pertinent to their subject and to develop their own skills of inquiry. Finally they continue this process with their classes.

Among the texts suitable for promoting ethical inquiry, historical, biographical and fictional narratives will certainly be useful, whatever the subject being taught. For example senior science classes studying genetics and the possibilities for genetic engineering would find it stimulating to read and discuss Peter Goldsworthy's (1992) humorous novel, *Honk if You are Jesus*. This work raises ethical issues concerning human motives and relationships associated with the general practice of science, and the uses which might be made of cloning by means of the substitution of DNA in human embryos.

Goldsworthy's central example of genetic engineering is the attempt by a wealthy gospel preacher to have implanted in his wife an embryo that contains DNA from biological material which he is convinced comes from the body of Jesus. The use of such a literary narrative in a science class can also help to break down the separation of the sciences and the humanities in higher levels of education, a separation which I have argued previously in this study is disastrous for both fields of endeavour and for society at large. Goldsworthy himself exemplifies the bridging of the two cultures, since he is both a general medical practitioner and a successful novelist. Furthermore, he has demonstrated an acute awareness of the wider cultural significance of both scientific issues and of the debates taking place among literary theorists.⁶⁷

Critical literacy theorists and practitioners could profitably address the 'two cultures' problem in both schools and universities, but in many cases they might first have to set aside their prejudices and re-educate themselves in scientific and mathematical discourses. The work of the science fiction novelist and discourse theorist, Damien Broderick, (1994) might be a good place to begin. As part of this project, the bringing to bear of ethical considerations on the application of science and technology could have beneficial results for the long-term survival of humanity and other species. A novel which would provoke useful discussion here is William Gibson's (1984) *Neuromancer*, which raises issues concerning the use of computers and virtual reality technology.⁶⁸ Science and mathematics teachers could perhaps also use historical and biographical narratives as a means of teaching the history and philosophy of their disciplines, in order to help their students understand the nature of the truth claims which are made in these disciplines, and the extent to which they are socially, psychologically and textually constructed. Of course, all disciplines, including English, should include this strand in their syllabuses.

Another major element of The Hutchins School's values education program is the provision of initial and on-going support for teachers in deepening their understanding of ethics and morality, particular moral issues, pedagogical methods, and how to reconcile the open-ended aims of ethics education with the particular religious and moral commitments of an Anglican school. This last question is one which in more general terms confronts all teachers, whether they work in state or independent schools, since all teachers

⁶⁷ As a further example of the former see Goldsworthy's (1995) novel *Wish*, which addresses the issue of animal liberation through its treatment of the language capacities of gorillas and the use of these animals in scientific experiments. It also employs an extraordinarily tender love scene between a man and a gorilla. As an example of Goldsworthy's grasp of literary theory see his (1989) paper, "Of Blood, Sweat, Ink, and the Death of the Novel".

⁶⁸ For a detailed discussion of the metaphysics and ethics of virtual reality see Michael Heim. (1993)

and school communities have values to which they are committed and which influence their teaching, often unwittingly. Hutchins already has in place its own policy of committed impartiality, in which the school inculcates in its students, through its curricular, co-curricular, pastoral care and discipline programs, a set of values and practices - a culture - which it hopes the students will carry into adult life. However, the policy also recognises that an important part of this culture is the habit of questioning the values and practices of which the culture is constituted - not in a mindlessly rebellious way, but rather through reasoned, communal inquiry aimed at genuine reform. In this way the tendency to indoctrinate students, which is only one aspect of the legitimate aims of education, is offset by a commitment to giving them the power to understand and, if they so choose, to resist such indoctrination. Indeed, in a school which operates like this the eccentric and transgressive students will be valued not only for themselves but also for the much needed challenge which they bring to the dominant culture. One way in which this policy of dialogue between the dominant culture and its dissenters can be encouraged is by introducing students to a variety of increasingly sophisticated literary and media texts which give imaginative expression to the widest possible range of alternative ways of living, and by conducting open-ended discussions about them in order to develop a more complex appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses of these life-styles.

Establishing such a policy at the Hutchins School did not prove very difficult in practice, since, from the school's foundation in 1846 by a nephew of Thomas Arnold, it has combined a commitment to Christian moral values with the humanist tradition of rational and empirical inquiry. Thus the staff have been generally at ease in the territory of ethics education. However, creating a truly open-minded ethics education together with an ethically justified program of moral development in both state and fundamentalist religious schools is potentially more difficult. In the case of state schools the long-standing policy of the separation of church and state has combined with more recent policies of multi-culturalism to create a situation in which teachers have not been allowed to articulate their own value positions under any circumstances, except perhaps to reinforce the discipline policies of the school. The fact is that no education is value-free, and so state education systems must grasp the nettle of re-negotiating their community values and of implementing both moral development and ethical education programs. In Catholic and more fundamentalist schools the problem takes a somewhat different form. Such schools have a strong and often clearly articulated policy of moral development related to their unashamed

inculcation of religious beliefs. However, in some of these schools open-ended, ethical debate is not so strongly encouraged.

In both these types of schools, state and sectarian, English teachers are often well placed to take the lead in introducing moral and ethical education through the discussion of literature which itself models open-ended dialogue between dissenting voices. Teachers of English have thus found themselves articulating both 'good' and 'bad' morals which emerge in the narratives that are studied in class, and then opening these values up for scrutiny through discussion. It is my experience, too, that in fundamentalist schools teachers of English are more likely than teachers of other subjects to be accused by parents and administrators of introducing students to texts which they think might corrupt their children's morals, or of encouraging students to question the beliefs and values of the school and home. Often this is because such teachers, in spite of their own fundamentalist religious convictions, have also been formed by the dialogical tradition of the Western, humanist literary canon which they studied at school and university. A clearly articulated ethical and political literacy program might help English teachers in this situation to improve their practice and justify it to their detractors - although in extreme circumstances it may still not save their jobs. Certainly, given the philosophy of education which informs this study, an ethical and political literacy program would benefit students in these schools.

A particularly perplexing problem which has faced values education theorists is that of defining learning outcomes and assessing their achievement. At first sight this might seem to imply that teachers should evaluate the morals of their students. Of course such a practice would be abhorrent. Whilst in various aspects of community and school life it is necessary to judge particular *behaviours* which arise from or embody particular moral values - for example in a court of law, or in administering a school discipline policy, or in selecting a suitable candidate for a job - it would not be appropriate for a teacher to pass judgement on a student's commitment to a value position when it is expressed in an assessment task. What aspects of moral and ethical learning, then, is it possible and legitimate to assess? Brian Hill (1995) has addressed this question and devised a workable approach.⁶⁹

Hill defines values as the priorities individuals and societies attach to certain beliefs, experiences, and objects, in deciding how they shall live and what they shall treasure. He then analyses values as consisting of three components: a belief (or cognitive element), a feeling (or affective element), and

⁶⁹ The following summary of Hill's ideas was constructed from my notes of a lecture which he gave at the Philip Smith Education centre in Hobart in August 1995.

a commitment (or volitional element). Teachers, he says, can impart to students a range of capacities, but they ought not, in the end, to dictate to students their commitments. Thus, to take an extreme example, students can gain the capacity to empathise with (i.e. to understand - a cognitive operation) Hitler's motives, but we would not ask them to sympathise with (i.e. share his commitment to - a volitional operation) his policies. A commitment, Hill says, is a disposition to act on a belief, which is thereby constituted as a value. A commitment, then, is not a mere impulse. Commitments are acquired through a process of hearing, understanding, believing, and finally adopting the disposition to act upon that belief - a process, it should be noted, in which each of the stages can be acquired to varying degrees. It is possible and legitimate, therefore, to test the degree to which a student has heard, understood and believed the cognitive and affective elements of values education, but we should only teach towards, and hope for, particular commitments - we should not assess them.

On the basis of this rationale Hill lists the following cognitive and affective outcomes (i.e. assessment criteria) which can be taught and assessed in a values education lesson in an Australian studies class:

1. Description and transmission: e.g. the student identifies the value traditions and world-views which have had the most impact in the past on the evolution of contemporary Australian culture; describes the value system of major ethnic and religious groups in Australian society.
2. Clarification: e.g. the student explains what values are and how individuals acquire them; explains the concepts of rights and the main themes of international charters of human rights; explains the leading ethical ideas in the Australian form of liberal democracy.
3. Empathy: e.g. the student exhibits the capacity to empathise with the way members of different faiths and ethnic backgrounds see the world, and are motivated by their beliefs; shows ability to understand the feelings of people subject to political expression and various forms of discrimination.
4. Justification: e.g. the student evaluates the strength of value-judgements in terms of the adequacy of the reasons underlying them; exhibits awareness of the values which have influenced his or her own upbringing, and a capacity to critically examine them.
5. Negotiation: e.g. the student demonstrates both social and ethical skills in conducting values negotiation groups; exhibits the capacity to engage in non-defensive dialogue with people of different persuasions on values issues.
6. Participation: e.g. the student analyses issues involved in assessing needs and providing caring services in the community through government and voluntary agencies; shows ability to identify the motives of people who do and do not elect to participate in community helping services. (Hill, 1995)

The application of these criteria in assessing some of the capacities which an ethical and political critical literacy aims to impart to students will help to further legitimate its role in schooling. Furthermore, the application can be

easily effected in the study of a literary text. For example in relation to *Breaktime* students could be asked to describe the different value traditions which have produced the conflicts at work in Ditto's life; explain his attitudes to the value of literature; demonstrate, by writing from the characters' different points of view, an ability to empathise with Ditto and his father; analyse and evaluate the reasons which Ditto gives for his difficulties with his father; demonstrate through role playing the meeting and reconciliation of Ditto and his father in which they re-negotiate their differences. Furthermore, to treat the novel as more problematic, students could be asked to analyse and evaluate, from a feminist critic's perspective, Chambers' depictions of Ditto and Helen, and then to role-play a fictive discussion between Chambers and his critic in such a way that they negotiate between their different value positions and arrive at an agreement.

In order to illustrate, the teaching methods I have been advocating as applied to one of the vast range of literary texts which might be discussed in an ethical and political critical literacy class, I offer the following account of tentative responses to a play script which I have been teaching at grade 12 level. As with my discussion of *Breaktime* and 'Morpho Eugenia' in Chapter 3, I am following Harpham (1992) here in resurrecting the voice of the author in order to throw light on the aspects of the creation of texts, in the same way that it is possible to attend to the voices of readers in throwing light on the aspects of the criticism of texts. I also ask my students to respond to the text creatively as well as critically, and to reflect on both processes from an ethical perspective.

At the beginning of Dorothy Hewett's (1981) play, *The Chapel Perilous*, the heroine, Sally Banner, refuses to bow to the altar in her school chapel. At the end of the play, the stage direction says that Sally, whilst visiting her school again as a successful author, 'straightens her back and bows to the altar'. (90) In the context of the portrayal of Sally's rebellious character throughout the play this action seems surprising, and so I asked my students to discuss what meanings it suggested to them; whether it seemed to them a surprising action and, if so, why; and whether or not they thought it was the morally right thing for Hewett to have Sally do. The students then considered how other characters in the play might explain and judge Sally's action and what attitudes might influence the construction they would put on it. At this point I introduced to the class some ideas about how differing moral judgements could be supported by Christian, communist and hedonistic systems of ethics, each of which could be associated with particular characters in the play. Next I pointed out that theatre directors often feel free to adapt the script in ways they consider appropriate,

and asked the class to create alternative conclusions to the play and to consider their moral implications. Here I suggested that they might also consider what features might characterise a contemporary feminist production. Next I challenged the students to try to give an account of the beliefs which had formed their own opinions of the conclusion.

We had now reached a point in our exploration when it seemed appropriate to read Hewett's account of how she arrived at the ending given in the published text. Her explanation is contained in an essay entitled, 'Why Does Sally Bow?', reprinted in the 1981 Currency Press edition of the play. One advantage of this account as a teaching instrument is that it does not attempt to close off the proliferation of interpretations of the play. Of course, playwrights are accustomed to working with directors and actors who bring different insights to the text, and they are often willing to rewrite scenes during rehearsal; so there is already at work here a tradition of open-mindedness about multiple and conflicting readings of the text. Hewett tells her readers that she remained dissatisfied with the two or three separate endings she wrote for the play and with the different ways the directors of the first two productions had handled it. Then she saw a student actress put her own interpretation of Sally on the scene by kneeling before the altar 'not humbly but proudly, head held high'. Hewett describes her reaction to this:

I saw this added business on the opening night and was, for one instant, outraged. How dare they make my Sally bow? Surely this made nonsense of her whole life?

My outrage has since been shared by others. The innovation has caused more controversy than all the rest of the play put together. At seminars, in letters, articles, reviews and foyer conversations, I have been faced with the accusatory question: "Why does Sally bow?" It is asked sometimes in puzzlement, sometimes in anger, sometimes in disappointment. I wrestled with the problem. I wrestled with the problem all that night; and next morning I accepted the gesture, for it is a gesture, not a capitulation. It is a gesture to the exigencies of life. Sally finally *accepts* life. 'So is that all there is in the end,' she says, 'to accept oneself, to be finally and irrevocably responsible for oneself?' The answer is 'Yes!' As she pauses at the entrance of her Chapel of Life and Death, under her ironic self-donated stained-glass window, she makes a kind of peace, not with the Church, not with the State, not with temporal authority, but with life itself, which includes authority.

The way that bow is given is very important. There is nothing craven nor defeated about it. It is an inclination of the head, a bow to the forces of life and death, the limitations of our own humanness, which we must all acknowledge. To this extent the play still remains unresolved. The conclusion is still ambivalent and depends greatly on the interpretation director and actress place upon it. Maybe this is inevitable.

My lesson was that I had to lose *myself* in order to complete *The Chapel Perilous*. A work of the imagination is not autobiographical in the accepted sense, although it may have strong autobiographical elements. The central figure had to be, in the end, a created character... Sally Banner lives only in the play. She doesn't exist outside it.

When I was writing *The Chapel Perilous* I was never conscious of it being a thesis play. I dislike thesis literature. Why then has it come to stand, for so many people, as a force for liberation? For many young women Sally

Banner is the first modern liberated feminist in our literature: I believe this is an historical and literary accident. Sally Banner came to life at a period when liberation and freedom began to be on the agenda, as indeed were repression and bigotry. She reflects her time and she appears to have passed through her time to become variously to others a modern day symbol, an ego-tripper of monstrous proportions, a boring self-advertiser, a vulgar hotpants and a heroine of liberation. Nobody seems to view her, as I do, with quiet, calm acceptance. I seem to have created some kind of female *doppelganger*, which is both humbling and irritating, because, like the albatross, I suspect she will always be slung around my neck. (xi, xix)

Having read this passage, my students put their questions about it on the board and proceeded to discuss them in turn, according to the usual Philosophy for Children method of the community of inquiry. Sitting with the class in a circle, I took part as a community member, but where I felt students were missing useful points to do with ethics and literary theory, I interposed, as teacher, appropriate questions of my own. In this way the discussion teased out some of the concepts which I have touched on in this study.

For example, it would be hard to find a clearer illustration of Harpham's (1993) account of the ethics of criticism and creativity: final answers to moral questions are not supplied by the text of the play, since it will always remain open to various interpretations. Instead the answers must be determined by the moral agents who write, direct, act, view and respond to the play. And, in Iris Murdoch's (1992) terms, these decisions are made in the light of our knowledge of 'the Good' (or goods) which we garner in the course of lives lived in the rich fields of bodily and cultural experience, and reflected upon in private meditation and public conversation. To highlight these concepts, I drew attention to the powerful imperatives in the third and fourth paragraphs of the passage: '...the forces of life and death, the limitations of our own humanness, which we must all acknowledge... I had to lose *myself* in order to complete *The Chapel Perilous*.... the central figure had to be, in the end, a created character...' I then asked the class to consider what were the grounds for their authority. Of course, as I have argued in this study, my view is that ultimately 'the forces of life and death' and 'the limitations of our own humanness' - in other words, the biological and physical conditions of our existence - must be recognised as determining in far from trivial ways the discourses which shape our lives. But I was not necessarily going to tell them that straight away. Finally, I set my students to write a short story, dramatic sketch or poem about an incident in Sally's life, one not recorded in the play, and to append to it a reflection on the ethical choices which they had to make in creating it. Then, of course, the process of ethical criticism began again as the students read and discussed each other's work, confronting in the process another ethical problem: how to judge one another's efforts with both justice and mercy.

Dialogue in a spirit of rigorous communal inquiry remains the best hope we have of dealing with the moral dilemmas confronting us in the postmodern world. It seems especially effective when it is conducted face to face, as in the classroom or around the international conference table, where it brings into play a much richer variety of signifying systems than the disembodied language of writing alone can provide. But this point takes us into the wider realms of semiotics, where it raises further interesting questions - particularly in the light of Derrida's famous deconstruction of Plato's privileging of speech over writing. These are questions which it has not been possible to explore here, except in so far as I have tried to resurrect the voice of the author, and his or her intention to communicate, in contributing to our complex deliberations about the meanings of literary texts.⁷⁰ I can only reiterate that the intimacy of dialogue has the potential to draw into the discussion the entire panoply of ways of seeking 'the Good' which Iris Murdoch calls upon in her encyclopaedic review of the Western metaphysical tradition, and which in this study I too have attempted to revive. Dialogue is a method which is being used extensively in our pluralist society by medical ethics committees, business ethics centres,⁷¹ and countless agencies dedicated to resolving disputes. It is also an important method by which moral philosophers have attempted to construct ethical systems.⁷² Of course, there is a great deal of work still to be done in defining an ethics, a theory of ethical criticism and a pedagogy of ethical and political critical literacy for our time. Indeed, this is a task which may never be complete: undoubtedly it will continue to take the form of negotiation and re-negotiation between dissenting voices in imaginative, rational and emotional dialogue. Nevertheless, there is reason to hope that humanity's ideas about how to live together as best we can may evolve in ways which will enable us to adapt and flourish in changing environments.

In the classroom, then, our most powerfully educative and ethically liberating pedagogy is that dialogue which takes place between teacher and student, between student and student, between class and text, between text and

⁷⁰ I am not alone in this task: Susan Stanford Friedman (1991) notes that, since the death of the author will not serve the needs of feminism, 'where Barthes's text is an infinite web seemingly spinning itself, [Nancy K.] Miller insists on reintroducing the spider - as author, as subject, as agent, as gendered body, as producer of the text'. The image of the infinite web spinning itself may only be appropriate when applied to the universe as a whole - or God, if they are not one and the same entity.

⁷¹ For example the St James' Ethics Centre in Sydney conducts a program of workshops, discussion groups and telephone counselling services to assist businesses in dealing with ethical issues. See their quarterly newsletter, *City Ethics*, GPO Box 3599, Sydney NSW 2001.

⁷² See Christina Slade (1996) for a philosophical discussion of dialogue, or 'discourse reasoning', as a non-trivial method of 'conversing across communities' and dealing with serious differences without falling into more extreme forms of relativism.

text, and between text and context. But there is one form of dialogue which has been omitted from this list - perhaps the most important kind: the dialogue between dissenting voices which has formed the mind of the teacher, especially through wide reading in the 'mainstream' and the 'margins' of world literature, and which continues unabated in her thinking through successive disillusionments and re-enchantments. Only the teacher whose mind remains open can exemplify and instigate open-ended dialogue in the classroom.

You can't be a philosopher (not even the teacher of philosophy) if your mind is made up on a question before you arrive, if in class it does not commence, if it does not resume the course from the beginning. (Jean-François Lyotard, 1992: 116)

Bibliography

- Abrams, M.H. (1977) "The Deconstructive Angel." In D. Lodge (1988) *Modern Criticism and Theory: a reader*. London: Longman.
- ____ (1988) *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Fifth edition, Fort Worth: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Achebe, Chinua. (1989) "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's Heart of Darkness." In *Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays*. New York: Doubleday, 1-20.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. (1973) *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Ann Arbor: Ardis.
- Barker, Philip. (1994) *Michel Foucault: subversions of the subject*. London: Allen & Unwin.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. (1992) *Intimations of Postmodernity*. London: Routledge.
- ____ (1993) *Postmodern Ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- ____ (1995) *Life in Fragments: Essays in Postmodern Ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell - Allen & Unwin.
- Belsey, Catherine (1980) *Critical Practice*. London: Routledge.
- Benhabib, Seyla. (1992) *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Berkeley, George. (1710; 1962) *Principles of Human Knowledge; Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonus*. G.J. Warnock. (Ed.) London: Collins / Fontana.
- Bloom, Harold. (1994) *The Western Canon*. New York: Harcourt Brace and Co.
- Booth, Wayne. (1988) *The Company we Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bradie, Michael. (1992) *The Secret Chain: Evolution and Ethics*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Broderick, Damien. (1994) *The Architecture of Babel: Discourses of Literature and Science*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
- Byatt, A.S. (1991) *Passions of the Mind*. London: Vintage.
- ____ (1992) *Angels and Insects*. London: Vintage.
- Cam, Philip. (1995) *Thinking Together: Philosophical Inquiry for the Classroom*. Sydney: Hale & Iremonger/PETA.

- Campbell, Donald. (1974) "Evolutionary Epistemology." In P. Schlipp (Ed.) *The Philosophy of Karl Popper*. La Salle: Open Court Publishers.
- Caputo, John D. (1989) 'Disseminating Originary Ethics and the Ethics of Dissemination.' In Arleen B. Dallery and Charles E. Scott (Eds.) *The Question of the Other: Essays in Contemporary Continental Philosophy*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Carroll, Joseph. (1995) *Evolution and Literary Theory*. Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press.
- Chalmers, David J. (1996) *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Chambers, Aidan. (1978) *Breaktime*. London: The Bodley Head. Reprinted in 1995 as A Red Fox Book, London: Random House Children's Books.
- _____. (1985a) *Dance on My Grave*. London: The Bodley Head.
- _____. (1985b) *Booktalk: Occasional Writing on Literature and Children*. London: The Bodley Head.
- _____. (1987) *Now I Know*. London: The Bodley Head.
- _____. (1989) *The Toll Bridge*. London: The Bodley Head.
- Churchland, Paul. (1995) *The Engine of Reason, the Seat of the Soul*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.
- Clarke, S. and Simpson, E. (1989) *Anti-Theory in Ethics and Moral Conservatism*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Coleridge, Mark. (1992) "Deconstruction and the Bible." *Pacifica*, 5: 123-144.
- Conrad, Joseph. (1897; 1969) *Joseph Conrad's Letters to R. B. Cunningham Graham*. C. T. Watts (Ed.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. (1899; 1990) *Heart of Darkness and Other Tales*. Oxford: The World's Classics, Oxford University Press.
- Coveney, P. and Highfield, H. (1995) *Frontiers of Complexity: the search for order in a chaotic world*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Cranford, M. (1996) *The Social Trajectory of Virtual Reality: Substantive Ethics in a World Without Constraints*.
<http://www.pespmc1.vub.ac.be/CYBSPASY.html>.
- Crew, Gary. (1990) *Strange Objects*. Melbourne: Heinemann.
- Crick, Francis. (1995) *The Astonishing Hypothesis*. London: Simon and Schuster.
- Critchley, Simon. (1992) *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Lévinas*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Cuddon, J.A. (1992) *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. London: Penguin.

- Culler, Jonathan. (1988) *Framing the Sign: criticism and its institutions*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Cupitt, Don. (1987) *The Long-Legged Fly: a Theology of Language and Desire*. London: SCM.
- Dallery, A. and Scott, E. (Eds.) (1989) *The Question of the Other: Essays in Contemporary Continental Philosophy*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Darville/Demidenko, Helen. (1995) *The Hand that Signed the Paper*. Melbourne: Heinemann.
- Darwin, Charles. (1839) *Journal of the Researches into the Natural History and Geology of Various Countries Visited by HMS 'Beagle'*. London: Henry Coburn. The 1860 revised edition is reprinted as Leonard Engel (Ed.) (1962) *The Voyage of the Beagle*. Garden City, N.Y: Anchor Books.
- _____. (1859) *On the Origin of Species by Natural Selection*. London: John Murray. The second edition (1860) is reprinted in the Modern Library series by Random House, New York.
- _____. (1871) *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*. London: John Murray. The second edition (1874) is reprinted in the Modern Library series by Random House, New York.
- Davies, Paul. (1992) *The Mind of God*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- _____. (1994) *The Last Three Minutes*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson.
- Dawkins, Richard. (1976) *The Selfish Gene*. London: Oxford University Press.
- _____. (1982) *The Extended Phenotype*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- _____. (1986) *The Blind Watchmaker*. New York: W.W. Norton and Co.
- _____. (1996) *Climbing Mount Improbable*. London: Viking.
- Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Felix. (1983) *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- _____. (1987) "Rhizome." In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 3-25.
- Dennett, Daniel C. (1991) *Consciousness Explained*. New York: Little, Brown and Co.
- _____. (1995) *Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meaning of Life*. London: Allen Lane.
- Derrida, Jacques. (1976) *Of Grammatology*. Trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press
- _____. (1995) *The Gift of Death*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Diamond, Jared. (1992) *The Rise and Fall of the Third Chimpanzee*. London: Vintage.

- Docherty, Thomas. (Ed.) (1993) *Postmodernism: A Reader*. New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- Dowling, Carolyn. (1996) *From Text to Teapots: Constituting the Subject in Computer-Based Environments*. World Wide Web: <http://pespmc1.vub.ac.be/CYBSPASY.html>
- Eagleton, Terry. (1983) *Literary Theory: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- _____. (1984) *The Function of Criticism*. London: Verso.
- Engelbreton, K. and Elliott, R. (1990) *Chaos or Clarity: encountering Ethics*. Wentworth Falls: Social Science Press.
- Fish, Stanley. (1990) "Rhetoric" in Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin. (Eds.) *Critical Terms for Literary Study*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 203-222.
- Forrestal, P., Cook, C. and Dainutis, J. (1992) *The Learning Language Series: Making Meanings*. Melbourne: Longman.
- Foucault, Michel. (1984) *The Foucault Reader*. Paul Rabinow (Ed.) New York: Pantheon Books.
- Freadman, Richard and Miller, Seumas. (1992) *Re-Thinking Theory: a critique of contemporary literary theory and an alternative account*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Freire, Paulo. (1972) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Friedman, Susan Stanford. (1991) "Weavings: Intertextuality and the (Re)Birth of the Author." In Jay Clayton and Eric Rothstein (Eds.) *Influence and Intertextuality in Literary History*. Madison and London: The University of Wisconsin Press. 146-180.
- Gaarder, Jostein. (1995) *Sophie's World*. London: Phoenix.
- Gaita, Raymond. (1992) "The Responsibility of Intellectuals: Truth", *Quadrant*, 36, 5: 27-29.
- Gazzaniga, Michael. (1994) *Nature's Mind: the biological roots of thinking, emotions, sexuality, language, and intelligence*. London: Penguin.
- Geach, Paul. (1977) *The Virtues*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Gee, James. (1990) *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses*. London: Falmer Press.
- _____. (1993) "Postmodernism and Literacies." In C. Lankshear and P. McLaren. (Eds.) *Critical Literacy: Politics, Praxis and the Postmodern*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Gibson, William. (1984) *Neuromancer*. New York: Ace Books.
- Gilbert, Pam. (1993) "(Sub)versions: using sexist language practices to explore critical literacy." *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*. 16, 4: 323-332

- Goldsworthy, Peter. (1989) "On Blood, Sweat, Ink, and the Death of the Novel."
In *Maestro: An Interactive Study Guide*. Sydney: Harper Collins.
- _____. (1992) *Honk if You are Jesus*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson.
- _____. (1995) *Wish*. Sydney: Angus & Robertson.
- Gribbin, Mary and John. (1995) *Being Human: putting people in an evolutionary perspective*. London: Phoenix.
- Groome, Thomas H. (1980) *Christian Religious Education: Sharing our Story and Vision*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Guin, Philip. (1993) "Reflections on Karl Popper and Philosophy for Children."
Critical and Creative Thinking. Vol. 1, No. 2: 2-8
- Habermas, Jurgen. (1990) *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*.
Trans. C. Lenhardt and S. Nicholsen. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press
- Harland, Richard. (1991) *Superstructuralism: the philosophy of structuralism and post-structuralism*. London: Routledge.
- _____. (1993) *Beyond Superstructuralism: the syntagmatic side of language*.
London: Routledge.
- Harpham, Geoffrey. (1992) *Getting it Right: Language, Literature and Ethics*.
Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Hart, Kevin. (1989) *The Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction, Theology and Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. (1990) "The Rhetoric of Literary Oppositions: Derrida's Reading of Rousseau and Nietzsche." In Andrew Milner and Chris Worth. *Discourse and Difference*. Clayton, Vic: Centre for General and Comparative Literature, Monash University, 1-28.
- Hawking, Stephen. (1988) *A Brief History of Time*. New York: Bantam.
- Heim, Michael. (1993) *The Metaphysics of Virtual Reality*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Herrigel, E. (1971) *Zen in the Art of Archery*. New York: Vintage.
- Hewett, Dorothy (1983) *The Chapel Perilous*. Paddington: Currency Press.
- Heylighen, Francis. (1993) *Epistemology, introduction*.
<http://www.pespmc1.vub.ac.be/EPISTEMI.html>.
- _____, Joslyn, C. and Turchin, V. (1994) *Introduction to Principia Cybernetica*.
<http://www.pespmc1.vub.ac.be/INTRODUCTION.html>.
- _____, Joslyn, C. and Turchin, V. (1995) *An Overview of the Principia Cybernetica Project*. <http://www.pespmc1.vub.ac.be/NUTSHELL.html>.
- _____ and Bollen, J. (1996) *The World-Wide Web as Super-Brain: from metaphor to model*. <http://www.pespmc1.vub.ac.be/CYBSPASY.htm>.
- Hill, Brian. (1991) *Values Education in Australian Schools*. Hawthorn: ACER

- _____. (1995) "Learning Outcomes and Assessment in Values Education."
Unpublished lecture given at the Philip Smith Education Centre, Hobart,
August.
- Hillis Miller, J. (1987) *The Ethics of Reading: Kant, de Man, Eliot, Trollope,
James and Benjamin*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hoggart, Richard. (1957) *The Uses of Literacy*. London: Chatto and Windus.
- Hunter, Allan. (1983) *Joseph Conrad's Darwinian Ethics*.
- Hunter, Ian. (1994) *Rethinking the School: Subjectivity, Bureaucracy, Criticism*.
St Leonard's, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Hutcheon, Linda. (1989) *The Politics of Postmodernism*. London: Routledge.
- Jameson, Fredric (1981) *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially
Symbolic Act*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- _____. (1991) *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*.
Durham, N.C: Duke University Press.
- Janks, Hilary. (1993) "Developing Critical Language Awareness Materials for a
Post-Apartheid South Africa." *English in Australia*, No. 106: 55-67
- Jefferson, A. and Robey, D. (Eds.) (1986) *Modern Literary Theory: A
Comparative Introduction*. 2nd Edition. London: Batsford.
- Johnson, Barbara. (1987) *A World of Difference*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins
University Press.
- Jolley, Elizabeth. (1979) *The Travelling Entertainer and Other Stories*.
Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press.
- _____. (1981) *The Newspaper of Claremont Street*. Fremantle: Fremantle Arts
Centre Press.
- _____. (1988) *The Sugar Mother*. Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press.
- Kant, Immanuel. (1785) *The Philosophy of Immanuel Kant*. Trans. L.W. Beck.
(1949) Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Kauffman, Stuart. (1995) *At Home in the Universe: The Search for Laws of Self-
Organization and Complexity*. London: Viking.
- Kress, Gunther. (1985) *Linguistic Processes in Sociocultural Practice*. Geelong:
Deakin University Press.
- _____. (1994) "An English Curriculum for the Future." *Changing English*, Vol.
1, No. 2: 97-112.
- Kuhn, Thomas. (1962) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. 2nd edn,
enlarged. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Langton, Rae. (1994) "Maria von Herbert's Challenge to Kant." In P. Singer.
(Ed.) *Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 281-294
- Lankshear, Colin. (1994) *Critical Literacy, Occasional Paper No. 3*. Belconnen
ACT: Australian Curriculum Studies Association.

- Leavis, F.R. (1949; 1962) *The Great Tradition*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- Lemke, Jay. (1993) "Critical Social Literacy for the New Century." *English in Australia*. No. 105: 9-15
- Lewis, C.S. (1967) *The Abolition of Man, or Reflections on Education with Special Reference to the Teaching of English in the Upper Forms of Schools*. London: Geoffrey Bles.
- Lipman, Matthew. (1982) *Harry Stottlemeier's Discovery*. Montclair, New Jersey: Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children. Australian edition by L.J. Splitter. Melbourne: Australian Council for Educational Research.
- _____. (1985a) *Lisa*. Montclair, New Jersey: Institute for the Advancement of Philosophy for Children. Published in Melbourne, Australia by the Australian Council for Educational Research.
- _____. and Sharp, Ann. (1985b) *Ethical Inquiry*. Lanham: University Press of America.
- _____. (1991) *Thinking in Education*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Livett, Jennifer. (1995) "Two Answers to Every Question: Elizabeth Jolley's Fiction, Ethics and Criticism." In *Australian Literary Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 1: 10-18
- Lodge, David. (Ed.) *Modern Criticism and Theory: A Reader*. London: Longman.
- Lorenz, Konrad. (1978) *Behind the Mirror: A Search for a Natural History of Human Knowledge*. Trans. Ronald Taylor. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. (1984) *The Postmodern Condition*. Trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- _____. (1992) "Address on the subject of the course of philosophy." In *The Postmodern Explained to Children: Correspondence 1982-1985*. Translations edited by Julian Pefanis and Morgan Thomas. Sydney: Power Publications. 115-123.
- McGowan, J. (1991) *Postmodernism and Its Critics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Maynard Smith, John. (1982) *Evolution and the Theory of Games*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mellor, Bronwen. (1989) *Reading Hamlet*. Scarborough, W.A: Chalkface Press.
- _____. and Patterson, Annette. (1994) "Producing Readings: Freedom versus Normativity?" *English in Australia* No. 109: 42-56.

- Menand, Louis. (1991) "The Politics of Deconstruction." *The New York Review of Books*. November 21: 39-44.
- Miller, James. (1994) *The Passion of Michel Foucault*. New York: Anchor Books.
- Moon, Brian. (1990) *Studying Literature: Theory and Practice for Senior Students*. Scarborough, W.A: Chalkface Press.
- _____. (1990) "What is Post-Structuralism?" *English in Australia*, No. 94: 8-21.
- _____. (1992) *Literary Terms: A Practical Glossary*. Scarborough, W.A: Chalkface Press.
- Morgan, Wendy. (1992) *A Post-Structuralist English Classroom: The Example of Ned Kelly*. Carlton, Vic: VATE.
- Muller, Vivienne. (1990) "Private Discourses from the Pedagogic Trenches." *English in Australia*, No. 94: 29-38.
- Murdoch, Iris. (1975) *A Word Child*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.
- _____. (1992) *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* London: Chatto & Windus.
- Norris, Christopher. (1983) *The Deconstructive Turn: essays in the rhetoric of philosophy*. London: Methuen.
- _____. (1993) *The Truth About Postmodernism*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Nussbaum, Martha. (1988) "Non-Relative Virtues: an Aristotelian Approach." In P. French et al. (Eds.) *Midwest Studies in Philosophy, Vol. XII: Ethical Theory: Character and Virtue*. Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press.
- _____. (1989) "'Finely Aware and Richly Responsible': Literature and the Moral Imagination." In S. Clarke and E Simpson (Eds.) *Anti-Theory in Ethics and Moral Conservatism*. Albany: State University of New York: Press. 111-133.
- _____. (1990) *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Parker, David. (1990) 'Is There a Future for English Literature?' *Quadrant*. September: 45-51.
- _____. (1993a) "The Ethics of Politics: Yeats's 'Easter 1916'." Unpublished paper. Canberra: Australian National University.
- _____. (1993b) 'The turn to Ethics in the 1990s.' Unpublished paper delivered at a conference entitled *Renegotiating Ethics: Moral Inquiry and Literary and Cultural Discourse in the 1990s*, Australian National University, Humanities Research Centre, 20 and 21 February 1993.
- _____. (1994) *Ethics, Theory and the Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Penrose, Roger. (1990) *The Emperor's New Mind: Concerning Computers, Minds and the Laws of Physics*. London: Vintage.
- _____. (1995) *Shadows of the Mind: A Search for the Missing Science of Consciousness*. London: Vintage.
- Pirsig, R.M. (1974) *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. London: Vintage.
- Plato. (1967) *The Republic*. Trans. H.D.P. Lee. London: Penguin.
- Pojman, Louis. (1990) *Ethics: discovering right and wrong*. Belmont: Wadsworth.
- Popper, Karl. (1963) *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- _____. (1979) *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach*. Revised edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Prain, Vaughan. (1996) "Readings by Request." *English in Australia*, No. 116: 31-37.
- Pride, Allan. (1992) "Ethical Deconstruction: a contradiction in terms?" Unpublished paper presented at the AATE National Conference in Hobart, September 1992.
- _____. (1993) "Ethics, Criticism and Creativity in a Post-Post-structuralist Classroom." Unpublished paper presented at the AATE National Conference in Adelaide, July 1993. Part of this paper has been published in *English in Australia*, No. 109: 57-75.
- _____. (1994a) "Critical Literacy: Political versus Moral Praxis?" A review of C. Lankshear (1994) *Critical Literacy*. In *Curriculum Perspectives* Vol. 14, No. 4: 52-54.
- _____. (1994b) "Grounds for Criticism: Ethical Foundations for Critical Social Literacy after Post-structuralism." *Realising the Future: proceedings of the 1994 AATE National Conference*. Perth, W.A.
- _____. (1995) "'Disillusionment and Re-enchantment': Ethical Literacy for Postmodern Life." Unpublished paper presented at the AATE National Conference in Sydney, January 1995, and at the NCTE International Conference in New York, July 1995.
- Rachels, James. (1990) *Created from Animals: the Moral Implications Of Darwinism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- _____. (1993) *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Rawls, John. (1971) *A Theory of Justice*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Read, Piers Paul. (1975) *Alive*. London: Pan Books.

- Rorty, Richard. (1991) *Consequences of Pragmatism: (Essays: 1972-1980)*.
New edition. Hempel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf.
- _____. (1993) 'In a Flattened World.' *London Review of Books*, 8 April: 3.
- Ross, Andrew. (1988) *Universal Abandon? The Politics of Postmodernism*.
Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Said, Edward. (1978) *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books
- Salusinszky, Imre (1987) *Criticism in Society*. New York: Methuen.
- Scholes, Robert. (1974) *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction*. New
Haven: Yale University Press.
- Siebers, Tobin. (1988) *The Ethics of Criticism*. New York: Cornell University
Press.
- _____. (1992) *Morals with Stories*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Singer, Peter. (1975) *Animal Liberation*. New York: New York Review Books.
- _____. (1993) *How Are We to Live? Ethics in an age of self-interest*. Melbourne:
The Text Publishing Company.
- _____. (1994a) *Rethinking Life and Death*. Melbourne: The Text Publishing
Company.
- _____. (Ed.) (1994b) *Ethics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Slack, Jennifer Daryl and Whitt, Laurie Ann. (1992) "Ethics and Cultural
Studies." In C. Grossberg, C. Nelson and P. Treichler (Eds.) *Cultural
Studies*. New York: Routledge.
- Slade, Christina. (1996) "Conversing across communities: relativism and
difference." *Critical and Creative Thinking*. Vol. 4, No. 2: 13-27.
- Splitter, Laurance and Sharp, Ann (1995) *Teaching for Better Thinking: The
Classroom Community of Inquiry*. Melbourne: ACER.
- Sprod, Tim. (1993) *Books into Ideas*. Melbourne: Hawker Brownlow Education.
- Taylor, Charles. (1989) *Sources of the Self: the making of modern identity*.
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. (1992) *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University
Press.
- Taylor, Mark C. (1986) *Deconstruction in Context: Literature and Philosophy*.
Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Tennyson, Charles. (Ed.) (1954) *Poems of Alfred Lord Tennyson*. London:
Collins.
- Thomson, Jack. (Ed.) (1992) *Reconstructing Literature Teaching: New Essays
on the Teaching of Literature*. Norwood, S.A: AATE.
- Tipler, Frank. (1996) *The Physics of Immortality*. London: Pan.
- Trivers, Robert. (1985) *Social Evolution*. New York: Benjamin.

- Vattimo, Gianni. (1988) *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Post-modern Culture*. Trans. Jon R. Snyder. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Wallace, Catherine. (1992) "Critical language awareness in the EFL classroom." In N. Fairclough (Ed.) *Critical Language Awareness*. Harlow: Longman.
- Watt, Ian. (1979) *Conrad in the Nineteenth Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Weinberg, Steven. (1992) *Dreams of a Final Theory*. New York: Pantheon.
- Williams, Bernard. (1972) *Morality: an introduction to ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- _____. (1985) *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*. London: Fontana.
- Williams, Raymond. (1958) *Culture and Society: 1780-1950*. London: Chatto & Windus.
- Wilson, Edward O. (1980) *Sociobiology*. Abridged edition, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- _____. (1994) *The Diversity of Life*. London: Penguin Books.
- Windschuttle, Keith. (1994) *The Killing of History: How a Discipline is Being Murdered by Literary Critics and Social Theorists*. Sydney: Macleay Press.
- Woolfe, Sue. (1996) *Leaning towards Infinity: How my mother's apron unfolds into my life*. Sydney: Vintage.
- Wright, Robert. (1995) *The Moral Animal: Evolutionary Psychology and Everyday Life*. London: Little, Brown & Co.
- Yatzeck, Richard. (1996) *Marlow's Lie*. A Lawrence University Freshman's Studies Lecture.
http://cwis.lawrence.edu/www/dept/frst/yatzeck_heart.html
- Zohar, Danah and Marshall, Ian. (1994) *The Quantum Society: Mind, Physics and a New Social Vision*. London: Flamingo.